



“Listening, hearing and drawing things together to work on solutions.”

NAPCAN Play a Part, Queensland, 2010-2013  
Evaluation-Research Report



Queensland University of Technology

Children and Youth Research Centre



**NAPCAN**  
PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE



## **Prepared for NAPCAN by QUT Children and Youth Research Centre**

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## Introduction

Child abuse and neglect has profound long-term personal, social and cultural costs. A report released in March 2013 by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare underlined a concerning increase in the number of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in Queensland, and nationally. The report indicated that during 2011-2012 7,681 children suffered abuse and/or neglect that required Queensland child safety interventions, including being placed on care and protection orders, in out-of-home care and/or referral to intensive family support services. The actual human cost stresses the necessity to progress prevention and early intervention stratagems to make a positive difference in the lives and futures of children and young people, before abuse and neglect occur.

There is a growing body of literature examining the social, psychological and environmental factors often associated with child abuse and neglect and considered effective prevention responses. Efforts aimed at strengthening families and building capacities, and social supports are suggested to decrease the likelihood of child abuse and neglect occurring. Effective and sustainable prevention strategies should, therefore, target families and communities through initiatives such as education, multi-discipline societal and family support, and ongoing community awareness to promote positive perceptions of children and young people, and in turn lead to the development of child friendly communities.

Responding to the idea of child friendly communities, Play a Part is an innovative program advancing preventative strategies for children and young people to minimise exposure to abuse and neglect. The program was developed ensuing an increase in notifications of suspected child abuse and neglect in 2007. Now completing the second phase, the program is a community engagement strategy that aims to prevent child abuse. Play a Part is described as “a whole of community approach to creating child friendly communities” (NAPCAN, 2012).

The Play a Part program was piloted between 2007 and 2010 in five southeast Queensland communities, and is currently operating in parts of Logan City region and the Redlands region. To assess the merit of the second phase of the program the Child and Youth Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology was contracted to undertake an evaluation-research at the beginning of 2013.

The objective of the evaluation-research was to investigate the initiatives and activities for the prevention of child abuse and neglect delivered in Beenleigh, Eagleby, Victoria Point, Redland Bay and the Macleay and Russell Moreton Bay Island communities. It aimed to evaluate how the program assisted these communities to action and sustain child friendly activities.

This report presents the findings from the evaluation-research and provides recommendations to progress effective prevention outcomes that stop child abuse before it happens.

### **Structure of the Report**

The remaining sections in this report cover the following:

*Section 2* provides a summary of the conclusions and recommendations.

*Section 3* describes details of the evaluation-research design and methodology, and an overview of how the analysis was conducted. The questions guiding the evaluation-research are listed at the end of the section.

*Section 4* recapitulates the Play a Part program, providing a brief history and background of the current program.

*Section 5* reviews the literature around child abuse and neglect protection and prevention, and current understanding and practices to appreciate the context within which the Play a Part program operates.

*Section 6* summarises the overarching conceptual framework of the Play A Part program. General measures and indicators are considered within the conceptual framework to specify appropriate appraisal within a whole of community approach to prevention strategies.

*Section 7* presents the interpretive findings under five main categories emergent from the data. This chapter includes an analysis of stakeholder perspectives on child abuse and neglect prevention, and their views regarding the Play a Part program achievements. Perceptions of the Play a Part program are drawn from internal documents and interviews with staff and stakeholders.

*Section 8* puts forward options and recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Play a Part program. Important distinctions are drawn in this section which explore the value of the work undertaken. The uniqueness and impact of the Play a Part program is assessed against the limits of existing knowledge and agendas for prevention strategies in Queensland. Recommendations are made to appreciate and expand initiatives to prevent child abuse and neglect before it starts, by building child friendly communities that support and value children and families.

## 2

*“It may seem simplistic to say ‘prevention is better than cure’, but it is an undoubted reality that without preventive strategies the cycle of intergenerational abuse will continue to infect successive generations.”*  
(Carmody, 2013, p. xii)

## Summary of conclusions and recommendations

The findings from the evaluation-research indicate that the Play a Part program had positive influence in Beenleigh, Eagleby, Victoria Point, Redland Bay and Macleay and Russell Island communities for families, young people and children. Stakeholders perceived Play a Part strengthened key protective factors associated with reduced occurrence of child abuse and neglect, including improved stronger social connections; positive child development; better access to concrete supports; and, the expansion of existing systems to support child friendly communities.

In line with the Queensland Government’s vision to support positive outcomes for children, young people and their families, Play a Part worked to ensure:

- children and young people are nurtured, healthy, safe and realise their full potential in their communities;
- families are strong, valued in their nurturing role, and capable of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people; and,
- communities and services (for example, child care services, schools and community health services) are safe, healthy, inclusive and supportive of children, young people and their families. (Queensland Government, 2013)

The key conclusions of the evaluation-research are:

- *Perspectives, vision and characteristics of Play a Part*

Children and young people’s perspectives are *at the heart* of Play a Part policies, and practices in a true spirit of respect and collaboration. Play a Part’s role and contribution to the communities was understood as a driving force that ensured optimum prospects for children and young people.

The broad conceptual orientation of the Play a Part program was an effective framework, transforming the identification and management of risk in individual circumstances to a premise of family and community interconnectedness, capacity and strengths to maximise protective factors.

The Play a Part program effectively emphasised a range of universal approaches across the whole of community. The program achieved this through the development of both formal and informal networks that involved children and young people in decision making about the diverse circumstances of their everyday lives.

Play a Part was seen by stakeholders as able to communicate a clear vision, and to listen to what community members said about their vulnerabilities, problems or issues.

- *Effectiveness of actions to sustain child friendly communities*

A composite approach provided unique advantages for staff to respond to a range of identified problems, and *to draw things together to work on solutions* to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect.

Reaching out, listening and applying a grassroots approach to solving problems were observed to assist the development of communities and implement positive changes towards improved child friendly communities.

Stakeholders perceived the active participation of children and young people in decision making-making and actions at local and regional levels was essential to build inclusive and child friendly communities.

The development of strong collaborative partnerships between government and non-government sectors has been an essential achievement of the Play a Part Program.

- *Identifiable catalysts and resources of successful engagement and empowering processes*

Stakeholders viewed prevention as a series of integrated processes. Within these processes, Play a Part worked to sustain ongoing commitment of the community to the development of local assets and resources to support child friendly communities.

Children and young people voiced their understanding of, and advocated for their need to live in connected and relational child friendly communities, to expedite protective factors against child abuse and neglect.

Through education, advocacy and inclusion Play a Part reinforced the capacity of service providers, agencies and community members to identify assets and enhance systems where gaps exist in local contexts.

Listening to and hearing children and young people as social citizens was fundamentally connected to respectful relationships. This involved strength based approaches with a focus on developing the whole person and being connected. Play a Part directly supported opportunities for children and young people to use their assets, strengths and skills by participating in and taking leadership of activities such as Speak Outs, iStreet Lab, coordinating events like the Blue Light Disco, and directly advocating to local councils, organisations and agencies through to the Federal government.

Staff members contributed individual skills, knowledge and perspectives to the program. As a team, this expedited the type of decision making uniquely possible through a multidisciplinary approach. The varied professional values, skills, language and knowledge

each staff member brought to the program fostered abilities to develop rapport and language of common goals with children and young people, as well as the interpretation and transparency of the program agenda to keep children safe.

- *Program achievements to inform future community development program related to child abuse*

Critically, Play a Part achieved an imperative for everyone to take responsibility in preventative interventions by responding to complex social determinants and strengthening infrastructure and connectivity for families.

Play a Part's work to involve children and young people positions the program as an important forerunner to develop useful agendas for a child-led, rights-based concept of participation in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Future phases of the Play a Part program should prioritise research investigating their child-led initiatives, to build evidence of how children and young people express their views in safe spaces, and how their views can be entrenched into the creation of child-led infrastructures.

There was consensus that sustainability guidance is an essential conclusive component to Play a Part's community development activities. Identification of champions to provide sustainability guidance was recommended by stakeholders to preserve the responsibility of the community for prevention-focused planning. Further work needs to be done to sustain the capacity of the recipient communities to continue innovations beyond Play a Part's engagement.

Future prevention programs must incorporate sustainability activities much earlier, and optimally as part of the initial design process.

### **Recommendation 1**

A critical matter to resolve is to more directly align the collection and use of data to the Play a Part program orientation and selection of specific strategies.

### **Recommendation 2**

Continue to actively and creatively involve children and young people by 'speaking with', 'listening to' and 'including' them at the heart of prevention strategies to ensure their efficacy to wield cultural and normative influences in and with their communities.

### **Recommendation 3**

Build on previous program experience and achievements, and the knowledge and skills of staff to maximise multidiscipline thinking and actions in the development of child friendly communities.



#### Recommendation 4

Given the existing prevention initiatives in Queensland, recommendation is made to strongly advocate for significant and new investment in the potential of integrated community-based prevention strategies to impact child safety and wellbeing at a whole of community level.

# 3

The evaluation-research reviewed the program's conceptual orientation and demonstration of best practice.

## Method

A qualitative approach was used to determine perspectives and appreciation of how the community responded and perceived the practices, vision and characteristics of the Play a Part program. The evaluation-research also reviewed the program's conceptual orientation and demonstration of best practice that aligned to principles of a whole of community approach for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The evaluation-research involved scanning literature for current information and knowledge on prevention of child abuse and neglect, reviewing program data, and seeking input directly from stakeholders in the Logan City and Redlands regions.

QUT granted ethics approval in 2013 to conduct in-depth interviews (approximately 60min) and focus groups (2 x two-hour focus groups) with key stakeholders and staff of the program. In total 28 people participated in the focus groups and interviews including stakeholders from Consortium members, local networks, government, non-government organisations, community workers, service providers, agencies, child-care workers, parents, young people, and Play a Part staff. Participants provided voluntary consent; identifying information (e.g., personal and institutional names) has been removed and replaced with general descriptors based on data from the transcripts.

The evaluation-research draws on the comparison of data from multiple perspectives. In a multiple perspectives approach the assumption is that confidence in findings is increased if diverse forms of data, gleaned from a variety of stakeholders and/or a number of different data collection methods, support the same conclusion (Lammers, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The evaluation-research draws on the following components:

- examining reports, agreements, service documents and publicity produced as part of the program;
- examining available data and documents that complement the study (e.g. legislation, policy, academic literature);
- liaising with Play a Part staff about interviewees regarding suitable candidates, their contacts details, and suitable numbers for the evaluation;
- contacting interviewees, arranging the interviews, and conducting the interviews using the semi-structured question brief prepared from review of reports and literature;
- interviewing a selection of stakeholders (e.g. Consortium members, NGO partners, Project Managers), staff, and young people involved with participating stakeholders at each of the geographical areas;
- transcribing relevant parts of the interview recording to enable analysis; and,

- deducting relevant themes and responses from the data to answer the research and evaluation questions.

Analysis of the data was carried out using a general inductive approach to establish clear links between the evaluation-research objectives and the summary findings derived from the data, and to compare the program's conceptual orientation to the underlying structure of experiences or processes evident in the raw data (Thomas, 2003). Emerging themes were established via a meticulous study of the interview transcripts, appraisal of program data, and readings and interpretations of contemporary literature. These themes were organised around five broad codes: outcomes; program model; services; staff; family & community.

The following questions guided the evaluation-research and elucidation of the results.

### 3.1 Research and evaluation questions

1. How has the Play a Part (PAP) program assisted communities to action and sustain the development of resources and initiatives to be child friendly communities?
2. Are there identifiable catalysts and resources that can ensure successful engagement and empowering processes?
3. Can program achievements be expanded upon in future community development programs related to child abuse?

# 4

Taking part in creating child friendly communities is both a rewarding and sound investment in the future health of our communities

## Overview of the Play a Part program

### 4.1 Play a Part Ideation

Queensland Department of Communities funded the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) to develop and implement a geographically centred program aimed at prevention, by building communities that support and value children and families. NAPCAN is a small national organisation with a strong history of working to advance preventative strategies for children and young people to minimise exposure to abuse and neglect.

Four strategies underpin NAPCAN's approach to bring about the changes necessary in individual and community behaviour to stop child abuse and neglect before it starts. These are:

#### **Promoting quality child abuse prevention research**

Promoting quality research so that the causes and impact of child abuse and neglect can be better understood and effective ways to prevent it can be developed and measured.

#### **Advocating for child safe policies and strategies**

Advocating for changes in policies and strategies that place the wellbeing of children and young people first.

#### **Coordinating National Child Protection Week and promoting the PLAY YOUR PART initiative**

Informing public awareness and attitudes to shift the thinking, so providing a safe community for children and young people is a concern shared by all Australians. To provide educational information and resources to ensure everyone has the knowledge and skills needed to take action in small or large ways to support children and families and reduce child abuse and neglect in Australia.

#### **Demonstrating good practice**

Developing and promoting community led prevention programs and initiatives that are evidenced based and effective in reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect.

## 4.2 Play a Part First Phase (2007-2010) – The Pilot

*“The potential of Play a Part to enhance sustainability and ripple effects was considerably enhanced... by helping communities develop and implement action plans to achieve their goals.” (Marsden, 2010, p. 9)*

The first phase of the Play a Part program (2007-2010) was implemented in the Gold Coast, Springfield Lakes, Toowoomba, Inala to Goodna, and Chermside localities. Phase one of the Play a Part program primarily utilised a ‘catalyst’ approach. The catalyst approach is described as a process in which individual efforts of the project workers aimed to influence collective efficacy and action with existing community agencies and groups to build shared responsibility for protecting children (O’Connell, & Slocombe, 2010, p. 3). As such, the catalyst approach of development was a model for initiating prevention of child abuse and neglect by:

1. Constructing partnerships and collaborative communication processes,
2. Facilitating resource sharing, and
3. Outwardly influencing behaviour, attitudes and principles held by agencies and communities, and therefore influencing support for families and children.

The key activities of the program involved community education seminars to promote child abuse prevention, and support to develop action plans to help create child friendly communities. The evaluation report of the first phase indicated the program had overall positive effects in increasing child friendly community features in the geographical areas (O’Connell & Slocombe, 2010). The community education activities were successful for awareness-raising with agencies. However, there were some limitations indicated in terms of embedded change through education activities alone. The significance of dedicated project facilitators was specifically recommended to build on the assets and resources of the primary community agencies, and to support a strength-based approach to sustain ownership of initiatives in communities.

## 4.3 Current Play a Part ideation, Phase Two (2010-2013)

*“The Play A Part program has opened up people’s thoughts to preventing child abuse and neglect. Play A Part has expanded ideas of how preventing child abuse and neglect can look very different depending on where you are, who you are, who you see, who your contacts are, and what your experiences are.” – Program Manager*

The second Phase of the Play a Part program (2010-2013) was implemented in Beenleigh, Eagleby, Victoria Point, Redland Bay and the Macleay and Russell Moreton Bay Island communities. While geographically close, the communities involved were very different in terms of opportunity, unity, social environment and access to facilities and services. The chosen localities for phase two were stipulated by the department and corresponded with high reporting statistics of child abuse and neglect from those communities.

There was no structured bridging or reciprocity between the groups and communities involved in the first and second phases of the Play a Part programs. In addition, there was

no continuity in staffing, or transition funding to bridge the work between these two phases. A Program Manager joined Play a Part in November 2010, shortly followed by two project facilitators. The first month of the program was dedicated to fleshing out an implementation plan, and establishing content and staff training around child protection and safety, child protection acts, systems and processes in Queensland. The second phase built on the success of the community education activities to raise awareness with agencies acknowledged in the first phase, and further sought to support strength-based approaches to sustain ownership of initiatives in communities.

## 4.4 Play a Part Program Framework

The Play a Part program is innovative in the way it looks at child abuse. Rather than a crisis-driven approach, or mitigating risk to individual children or families in the aftermath, Play a Part applies a broad community-partnership approach to prevent children and families from needing a child protection response. The program is delivered under the assumption that when communities and individuals are informed, better connected and feel empowered, they are better equipped and able to make positive changes in their lives to reduce the risk of harm to children and their families.

Implementation of Play a Part in Beenleigh, Eagleby, Victoria Point, Redland Bay and Macleay and Russell Island communities involved working with relevant networks, establishing reference groups and partnerships, and drawing together individuals, families and communities to work on solutions to prevent collective problems that lead to child abuse and neglect. The target group was families with children aged 0-8 years with a priority on the most vulnerable children, young people and their families.

The Play a Part program operates within a theoretical framework that guides interventions related to parent-child relationships as well as: about how the communities, children and families live in and influence social connection and networks; gain access to resources and support; and the overall positive functioning of a family. The framework that underpins the Play a Part orientation determines the problems and solutions to achieving inclusive, safe, and child friendly communities.

The framework is drawn from three tenets for providing services and activities focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect. These are:

- i. A public health model,
- ii. A developmental-ecological methodology, and
- iii. An assets-based community development approach.

Principles informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; strategies for building child friendly communities; Innocenti Research Centre (UNICEF); and child inclusive practices guide service delivery. These provide building blocks that are directly linked to primary prevention of child abuse and neglect, and are within NAPCAN's realm of influence. Play a Part engages three types of activities to implement services in the targeted geographic areas. These are:

- a) Giving Children a Voice,
- b) Community Development, and
- c) Community Education

These key constructs are examined in this evaluation to investigate the pathways that have assisted communities to take action and sustain the development of resources and initiatives that lead to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, and propose directions for future research. Figure 1 (below) maps the conceptual framework for the actions and processes embedded in Play a Part to achieve the goals of child friendly communities responsive to the prevention of child abuse and neglect.



**Figure 1. Key constructs of the Play a Part Program Framework**

The next section explores literature of current prevention knowledge and programs to better understand how Play a Part is positioned against local, national and global approaches to prevent child abuse through the creation of child friendly communities.

## Literature review- Child Abuse & Neglect

The phenomena of child abuse and neglect are complex individual, family and societal issues. The ramifications endure as significant micro and macro factors in our communities. Current thought and values recognise children as members of a family and a community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to their stage of development (Reynaert, Bouverne-de-Bie, & Vandeveld, 2009). Therefore, community wellbeing and connectedness are recognised as essential components to curtail the occurrence of child abuse and neglect (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Scott, Arney, Vimparni, Arney, & Scott, 2010). Emerging research and community/social work practice suggests there are many beneficial outcomes of community wellbeing and connectedness programs, policies and processes which enable self-determination and augment protective qualities of neighbourhoods and families for children (Bamblett, Harrison, & Lewis, 2010; Edwards & Bromfield, 2009; Freisthler & Crampton, 2009; McDonald, 2011).

In the recent past, international policy developments and social discourse have focused broader attention on the greater concerns of children's wellbeing and rights. Preventing child maltreatment: A guide to taking action and generating evidence' (Butchart et al., 2006), 'Preventing child maltreatment in Europe 2007' (WHO, 2007), 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003), and 'Protecting Children is Everyone's Business' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) all stress the critical role of the child's perspective being *at the heart* of policies and practices about children and young people's needs. This viewpoint acknowledges that children are experts of their own experiences. In practice it requires supporting processes that give voice to children and young people's concerns to achieve prominence and investment in the early identification of patterns, causes, and effects of abuse and neglect, and preventability of problems (Gilbert et al., 2009).

Prevention and early intervention strategies are generally framed within a public health model. The public health model recognises the importance of social, economic and political aspects to prevent or alleviate risk factors of abuse or neglect (Raphael & Bryant, 2010). Efforts to prevent the occurrence of child abuse and neglect are organised around three intervention levels: primary prevention (targeting the general population), secondary prevention (targeting at-risk individuals), and tertiary prevention (targeting affected individuals) (McCoy, McCoy, & Keen, 2009). Each level responds to distinctive causative issues with varied theoretical determinations that inform delivery of services and programs to prevent child abuse and neglect (Hunter, 2011). Importantly a public health model seeks to avoid blaming individuals (Watterson, 2003). A greater focus is placed on developing understanding of the social determinants and strengthening assistance to families and communities early enough to prevent abuse and neglect occurring (L. Bromfield & P. Holzer,



2008).

Despite calls to strengthen universal, primary and secondary approaches for the prevention of child abuse and neglect, dominant intervention strategies are underscored by legislative regulation, and statutory intervention targeting affected individuals and families (Farrell, 2004; Goddard & Tucci, 2008; Lonne, Parton, Thomson, & Harries, 2008; Tilbury, 2004; Tomison, 2002; Winkworth & White, 2011). Policies, procedures and practices to ensure the safety of children are provided at the tertiary level driven by risk-averse processes.

## 5.1 Risk and Tertiary Prevention

In Australia, as in other countries, comprehension of the safety and protection of children has focused on risk as the descriptive and predicative agenda. As a concept, risk has been defined as the probability and/or uncertainty of an adverse outcome, and as a measure of expected values (Aven & Renn, 2009). Discourse for organising and regulating policies, procedures and practices to ensure the safety of children often accept risk as a measurable object to assist risk assessment and its management. Stanley et al., (2011) explain three constructs of risk in child protection work. These are:

- “at risk”, in which child protection and social workers are expected to diagnose and identify risks for individual children and families;
- technological structuring, characterised by the development of risk assessment tools and risk management policies; and,
- “objective facts”, in which ideas are drawn on to legitimise risk as something that can be located and resolved (Stanley et al., 2011, p. 165)

Risk and protective factors are, accordingly the objectives influencing the safety and protection of children. Measures place importance on identification, reporting and proving specific types of abuse in individual families in order to safeguard against repeated occurrences (Goddard & Tucci, 2008). Ranking the risks and setting priorities to deal with the risk for the greatest benefit is assumed to improve anguish, scrutiny, responsibility, transparency and governance in relation to both decision making-making and outcomes to protect children from harm (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008a).

A risk framework for the safety and protection of children has predominantly focused on developing legal responses to the reporting of child abuse and neglect, and determining whether abuse or neglect was serious enough to warrant protective intervention (Lamont & Bromfield, 2010). Child protection therefore becomes a matter of concern to professionals in specialised social service, health, mental health, and justice systems, which aim to ensure adherence to education, enforcement, prosecution and other tools to change children's personal circumstances and control adversarial risks.

The child protection system provides a tertiary response, frequently as the solitary solution for individual families at risk of abuse and neglect (Daro, 2013; Lamont & Bromfield, 2010). Globally, challenges identified with tertiary child protection and welfare responses include increased notifications, proceduralised and forensically driven risk-assessment processes, and highly risk averse decision making-making processes (Bath, Bamblett, & Roseby, 2010; Commons, 2009; Dornstauder & Macknak, 2009; Gillingham, 2006; Gillingham &

Humphreys, 2010; Guzman, 2010; Munro, 2010). Problems such as single entry point, adversarial dealings, coercive interference, high caseloads, poor training and supervision, burnout, and high turnover of child protection workers, have been highlighted as major concerns with potentially detrimental consequences for children and young people experiencing abuse or neglect (Burns & MacCarthy, 2012; Carmody, 2013; Healy, Meagher, & Cullin, 2009; Higgins & Kaspiw, 2011).

Bromfield and Arney (2008) referred to child safety services in Australia as a failed 1970's experiment in response to 'do something' to address child abuse and neglect. The basis of this perceived failure is the threshold at which authorities intervene and the principal responsibility for the protection of children resting with statutory child protection services rather than also incorporating universal, child-centred prevention strategies within individual, family and community contexts (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008b; Meadows, Tunstill, George, Dhudwar, & Kurtz, 2011). Tertiary responses are needed to intervene in cases where there are serious protective concerns (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008a). Conversely, 80% of reports made in Queensland are recorded as 'children concern reports' and don't meet the threshold to warrant tertiary intervention (Carmody, 2013, p. 36). Progress to prevent child abuse and neglect from happening are minimised by an incapacity to address risks before tertiary strategies are implemented to crisis affected individuals and families (Daro & Donnelly, 2002). Three reasons for systemic failure were identified as: i) a lack of funding, and resources focused on early intervention to support families; ii) a risk-averse culture that focuses too heavily on coercive rather than supportive strategies; and, iii) an over reliance on the responsibility of child protection services for safeguarding children at a micro-family level (Carmody, 2013, p. xi ).

Numerous national advocacy groups, such as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (QCPCI), have acknowledged an over-reliance on tertiary child protection responses at the expense of universal strategies as unacceptably insufficient to lessen the occurrence, burden and consequences of child abuse and neglect in Australia (Peak Care Inc, 2012; Johnston & Ronken, 2013). The Council of Australian Governments advocates, *"Australia needs to move from seeing 'protecting children' merely as a response to abuse and neglect to one of promoting the safety and wellbeing of children"* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 7).

## 5.2 Universality; Primary and Secondary Prevention

Strategies to safeguard children and promote wellbeing require a shift in the premise of risk as a central tenet of prevention, and a re-evaluation of the efficacy of protective factors as a measurable fact of risks (Gillingham, 2006). Ameliorative prospects that promote interactions between the community, neighbourhood, family, and individual factors are recommended (Bessarab & Crawford, 2010; Earls, McGuire, & Shay, 1994; MacLeod & Nelson, 2000). Working in partnership, providing localised services and encouraging collective responsibility and action around the social dimensions of child abuse and neglect are principles that underpin a universal emphasis on prevention (Daro & Dodge, 2009; Higgins & Katz, 2008). Discourse to improve interventions point to the significance of multi-perspectival reflections in the context of the community, neighbourhood and family, and for

greater critical scrutiny of risk and predicative agendas (France, Freiberg, & Homel, 2010; Lonne, et al., 2008; McArthur, Thomson, Winkworth, & Butler, 2010; Parton, 2010).

Particular social configurations and egalitarianism are suggested to impact family and community problems related to child abuse (Wulczyn et al., 2010). A whole of system approach embracing economic, health, education, child-care and housing are recognised as essential to support individual and family protective behaviours, and to help prevent child abuse (Bogenschneider & Corbett, 2010; Butler, McArthur, Thomson, & Winkworth, 2012; Daro & Dodge, 2009; Higgins & Katz, 2008; Tomison, 2002). Governments in Australia, as well as internationally, are increasingly exploring system-based strategies that can address the complexity and interconnectedness of problems families face.

Programs such as Sure Start (UK), Healthy Families (US), Strengthening Families Approach (US) Family Start Manukau (NZ), the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and Communities for Children Initiative (Australia) retain a perspective on early childhood and the social needs of families as critical to underpin good parenting and strong family relationships. The Every Child Matters (UK) policy, which provides a contemporary influence on policy development in Australia, endorsed five outcomes as significant to promote child wellbeing and prevent adverse childhood experiences. These include:

- being safe;
- being healthy;
- enjoying and achieving;
- economic wellbeing; and,
- making a positive contribution (DfES, 2003).

The Every Child Matters policy employed broad social reform incorporating several government departments and ministries dedicated to reducing and eliminating negative impacts on children's everyday realities (Simon & Ward, 2010). Higgins and Katz (2008) maintain that wider social issues and broad service systems must intersect to facilitate optimum capacity for the protection of children and prevention of harm (p. 46). Recently, in the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, Carmody (2013) called for greater commitment and communal effort from everyone: politicians, bureaucrats, departmental staff, police, allied agencies and sectors, the community, and — most of all — families themselves, to transform an unsustainable reliance on child protection services. Furthermore, *The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*, describes protecting children as *everyone's business* and responsibility (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

Protecting children as *everyone's business* compels action at the local level while also encompassing holistic approaches to reduce the social problems family face, including thus abuse, from happening in the first place (Butler et al., 2012; McArthur et al., 2010; Pugh, 2010; Walker, 2012). As such, *everyone's business* comprises the idea of multiple connections, participation and collaboration to foster relationships that build protective processes and positive environments for children, young people and families (Wulczyn et al., 2010). Prevention is thus understood as a process rather than a measurable outcome (Bogenschneider, 1996).

### 5.3 Defining and measuring a whole of community approach

Over the past two decades several Australian audits have explored prevention programs and services to identify and build on existing evidence and best practice (Lohoar, 2012; McDonald, Higgins, Valentine, & Lamont, 2011; Poole & Tomison, 2000; Tomison, 2000). A number of promising strategies have been identified that use community development approaches as an effective way to build both family and system capacity (Lohoar, 2012). Nevertheless, shortage of funding, resources and an inadequate evidence base for long-term sound policy and practice is a recurrent theme of the audits. The reports shared concern about the lack of research evidence, the limited evaluation of programs, and information on just how individuals and communities learn about the ‘*business*’ of child abuse and neglect (Lewig et al., 2010; McDonald et al., 2011).

The implication of these shortages is that the evidence policy-makers and practitioners rely upon is inadequate. Efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect are impeded by a failure to refocus attention on measures and evaluation of social configurations and community-level factors rather than a risk-averse culture. Therefore, understanding the achievements resulting from universal prevention strategies and imperatives for everyone to take responsibility in early preventive interventions, remains an ignored or underappreciated aspect of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children (Higgins, 2011; Tomison, 2000).

#### *Summary*

The challenge for developing prevention stratagems is to conceive of an evaluation process suited to community or neighbourhood, and society wide approaches, both of which warrant practical resource allocation (Billings, 2000; Parton, 2011). Complex strategies and contexts require emergent, rather than predetermined actions and measures that create ongoing development of discovery, learning, and actions to protect children. Consideration must be given to how configurations in a program’s structure influences delivery, and thus how service delivery influences the outcomes and the reasons for effective prevention interfaces (Tomison, 2000).

The next section examines the three tenets that the Play a Part program has adopted, and considers general measures and indicators which are appropriate for a whole of community approach to child abuse and neglect prevention.

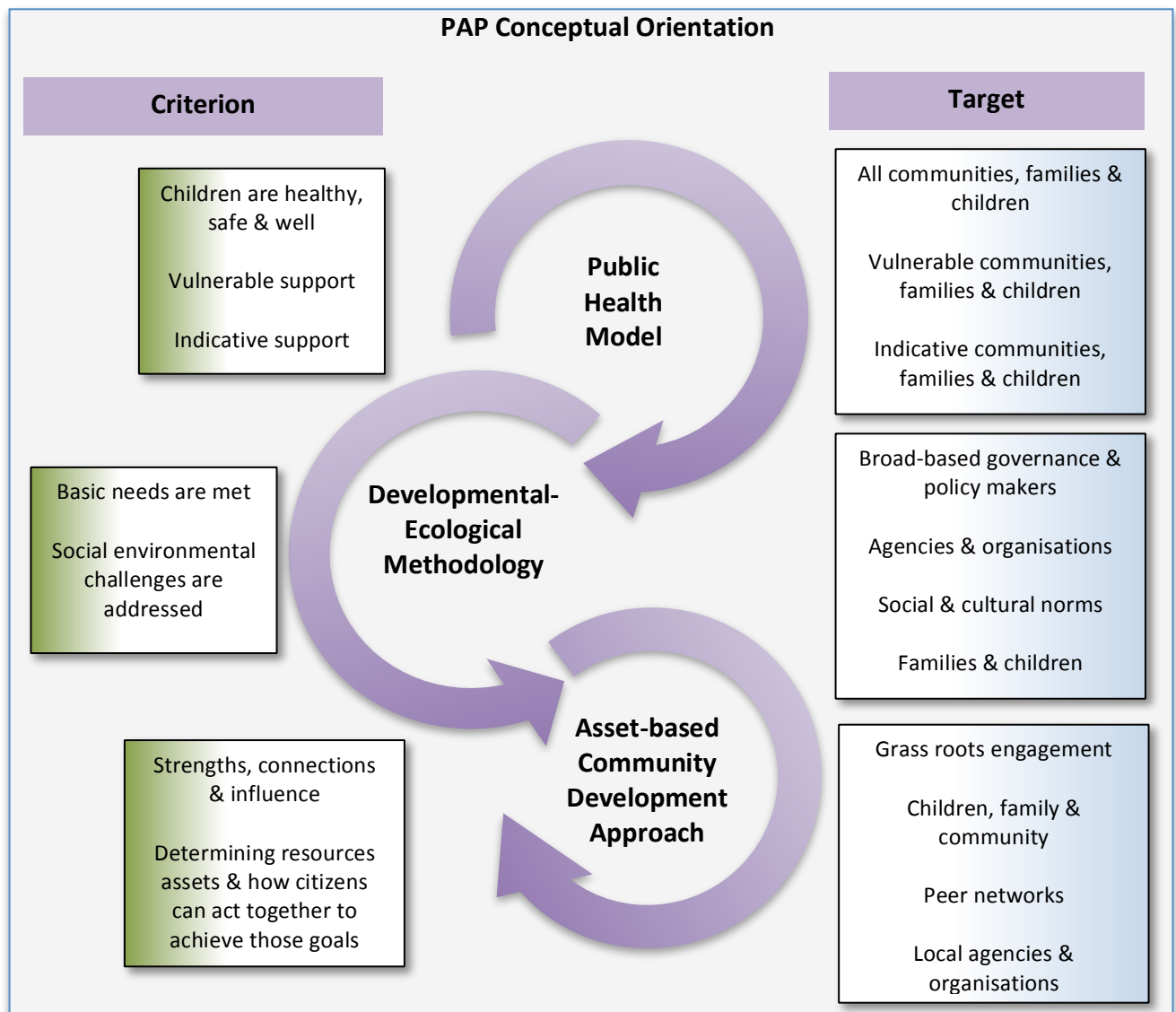
## Constructing the evidence - a whole of community approach

It is generally very difficult to use traditional measures, such as a reduction in reporting rates, to evaluate the global, community changes that may result from interventions (Tomison, 1997). The value and potential of a whole of community approach to the prevention of child abuse and neglect can be identified by evaluating the conceptual model used against alignment with community perspectives, needs, positive relationships among key stakeholders, successful implementation and effectiveness of activities, and ownership by the targeted communities. A whole of community approach is contingent on collaboration with organisations, services and local residents, and a commitment to partnerships within the communities targeted.

As an overarching method community engagement and development approaches are acknowledged as significant for local social, economic, cultural, environmental and political development. Community engagement has theoretical roots in sociology that recognise a variety of different approaches to the active and interactive involvement of communities at different structural levels and competences, to collectively solve problems. Community development involves change, improvement and vitality, and is understood as a process (Cavaye, 2006).

### 6.1 Conceptual orientation

The Play a Part program draws on three expansive conceptual orientations, which explicate community engagement and development methods to their aim to prevent child abuse through the creation of child friendly communities. Theories and models help design and plan interventions, and review the structure of the programs and services in responding to problems. The Play a Part program is organised within a public health model linked to primary prevention, and is attentive to a developmental-ecological methodology to foster multiple and interdependent protective and nurturing contexts for children. The third conceptual orientation is an asset-based community development approach that draws upon existing strengths and assets in local contexts to build stronger, more sustainable communities. Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual orientation that guides the prevention strategy.



**Figure 2. Play a Part Conceptual Orientation**

### *A public health model*

The public health model provides a conceptual model for child protection systems with the goal of providing preventive and collaborative services by accessing three levels of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary (Table 1). It is commonly used to describe prevention and protection of child abuse and neglect within the welfare service system and is a prominent orientation applied in critical appraisals and strategic planning (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008).

Level	Target & timing	Purpose
Primary	Whole communities or all families- before problems arise	To prevent child abuse and neglect through support & education
Secondary	Families and/or children/young people at risk of maltreatment occurring	To address risk factors, alleviate problems & prevent escalation, with a focus on early intervention
Tertiary	Families &/or children/young people where abuse or neglect has occurred	To reduce long-term implications of abuse or neglect & prevent re-occurrence

**Table 1. Public Health Model**

Source: (Allen Consultation Group, 2009, p.4),

The Play a Part program was implemented with a focus on primary prevention of child abuse and neglect. At the primary end of the continuum, interventions and strategies have a whole of community focus, and are effective when a range of universal approaches are used to build efficacy to address issues before child abuse and neglect can occur. Strategies can include broad-scale social marketing campaigns to shift relevant attitudes and community norms, the supports and services available through maternal and child health clinics, and the provision of high quality child care services.

Although this is a useful model to characterise aspects of the Play a Part program there are limitations with using the model that should be noted.

The public health model attempts to neatly categorise programs and services as primary, secondary or tertiary, while the complexity of issues around child protection and safeguarding often lead to blurred distinction. The Play a Part program did not fall neatly into a distinct public health model demarcation. In the dearth of universal prevention services and programs available in Queensland particularly (Carmody, 2013), efforts to implement effective prevention interventions required more concentric, horizontal and expansive actions to address interrelated individual and social issues and problems. In turn, this broader framework influences the development of methodology, approach, tools and measures for effective processes, practice and outcomes (Kickbusch, 2003; Wronka, 2007).

The targeted output and performance measures outlined in the Play a Part service agreement with the QLD Department of Communities (A01.2), specifically targets the delivery and measurement of service to vulnerable and/or indicative families and/or children and young people at risk. This is problematic to the universal approach of Play a Part, as tailored, culturally sensitive prevention programs, and flexible, generalist programs hold different objectives, resources and staffing, as well as varied management and assessment requirements.

NCCS Alignment	Classification Name	Output Measure	Reporting Frequency
A01.1	Information, Advice and Referral	Number of occasions that information, advice and referral services were provided (not provided elsewhere)	Quarterly
A01.2	Personal Support	Number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service users receiving personal support.	Quarterly
A01.2	Personal Support	Number of Culturally and Linguistically diverse service users receiving personal support	Quarterly
A07.2	Community/Group Development and Support	Number of occasions that community/group development and support activities were undertaken	Quarterly
DOC	Quality question	What significant achievements or factors have impacted on the quality of service delivery during the reporting period?	Quarterly
<p>Efficiency will be measured where output/ performance data relating to hours or occasions of service is available. The measure will be calculated by the department using the total amount of funding divided by the number of hours or occasions of service.</p> <p><i>This simple formula will provide indicative data only. The department recognises that other information also needs to be considered, such as the model and intensity of service delivery, the target group, and the service setting.</i></p>			

**Table 2. Service Agreement Performance Measures**

Whilst the Play a Part program distinguished the importance of universal and early intervention services delivered at the primary level, targeting support to at risk populations falls into secondary prevention arrangements. A more useful framework for orienting Play a Part programs and the assessment of outcomes within a public health model is the “composite approach”, wherein the significance of context and interconnectedness blur distinctions along the continuum of the public health tiers (Hunter, 2011).

### *Developmental-ecological methodology*

An ecological framework views local communities as ecosystems (Hawe & Riley, 2005). As such, the complexities of the social and political systems and the assets of communities, including people, settings, and events, underpin stratagems for prevention of child abuse and neglect. An ecological orientation is compatible with the public health model of prevention, specifically in consideration of a “composite approach”, because it provides conjectural understanding of systematic strategies to change macro characteristics, such as legislation and social norms, and micro characteristics of individual behaviours (Kenny & Wurtele, 2012). In short, the changes needed to prevent child abuse and neglect are understood as collective behaviours deeply rooted in context.

Ecological theory asserts that children are influenced by their family, their peers, school and work settings, as well as communities (Sidebotham, 2001). The ecological risk/protective theory contends that human development is shaped by a myriad of processes that must be identified in multiple levels of the human ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Emphasis on multiple factors and relationships as a central means of achieving change has particular



significance to improving child wellbeing and reducing maltreatment (Gilbert, Woodman, & Logan, 2012).

Play a Part's orientation to a developmental-ecological methodology emphasises the dynamic, reciprocal nature of development. That is, as children mature, society changes, and history moves forward, and the processes that influence development vary over time. The second phase of the Play a Part program endorsed intervention at the individual, relationship, community and cultural contexts of the communities it has worked with. These foci require flexible practices and multiple perspectives at a variety of levels to action and evaluate the outcomes (Belsky, 1993). The developmental-ecological methodology asserted the role of a wide variety of interventions targeted at different levels (Sidebotham, 2001). Levels are conceived of as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 513), and described here as the Global level (whole of societal system), Macro level (localised community and neighbourhood), Meso Level (family) and the Micro level (individual).

In the second phase of Play a Part early opportunities to gather data have been missed. However, conjecture about how the developmental-ecological methodology was useful to tackle systematic change will help future planning and research capacity. The Play a Part program, though a small localised prevention program, tailored context specific strategies to tackle both structural and intermediary factors of child abuse and neglect at the Global, Macro, Meso and Micro levels.

### *Assets-based Community Development*

The role and impact of community as a process for transformation was a notion championed by Freire, who believed people external to the community could provide a catalyst through critical engagement, dialogue and capacities for action (Ledwith, 2011). Developmental processes offer a basis on which effective preventive strategies are built. For example, community members may help by identifying practical solutions to better assist children, young people and families, and/or take part in a series of activities that help to promote the wellbeing and safety of children, young people and families in their communities. Reconnoitring connections between individuals and societal structures by listening, valuing and including grassroots perspectives in actions underpins the premise of an assets-based community development approach. For Play a Part the approach was useful to broaden the prevention framework by embracing the involvement and participation of children and young people to address the complexities of child abuse and neglect. As such, children and young people become the experts, with capacities to reflect and construct knowledge, and make meaning of the world together with adults and, equally important, other children (Malaguzzi, 1994). It is understood that children and young people wield cultural and normative influences within and as part of belonging to their neighbourhoods and larger communities (Morrow, 2002). Assets-based community development helps to maximise protective factors based on childhood capacity and building strengths, and suitably refocuses the idea of risk and children as vulnerable, passive recipients to concentrate on strengths and resilience of a community and on active agency (Morrow, 2002; Parton, 2011). Accordingly, indicators of prevention reframed in strengths and resilience can be measured in: children's perceptions of their value in the neighbourhood

and community; improved community attitudes and provision of services for children; perceived sense of safety and security; participative contribution and relationships; and economic sustainability and social wellbeing (Paton, 2011).

Within an asset-based approach, Play a Part upholds a child rights-based approach that fosters a vision of children as social citizens with participatory rights. The practice of listening and hearing children and young people as social citizens gives prominence and investment to the early identification of patterns, causes, and effects of abuse and neglect at meso and macro levels (Gilbert et al., 2009). Importantly, the promotion of child abuse prevention and early intervention efforts provided useful vehicles for developing a shared vision and sense of common purpose based on strengths to achieve important protective factors to reduce incidents of child abuse and neglect occurring. The asset-based community development approach provides a process whereby Play a Part works with services and organisations consciously and explicitly around the UN Charter on the right of the child to establish a solid foundation for child-centred, family focused, community based, society supported and globally advocated interventions.

As a catalyst to engage and empower communities, Play a Part adopted principles of the Innocenti Research Centre model. The principles are linked to primary prevention of child abuse and neglect, and the value of supporting and promoting every young citizen to:

- Play a part - be included in decisions, freedom to join with others, freedom to express themselves and freedom to receive information;
- Reach their potential - things needed to develop as best as they can, including education, family, culture and identity;
- Live well - the right to survival includes all the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, health and an appropriate standard of living; and,
- Be free from harm - children and young people are protected from violence, abuse, neglect, economic exploitation, torture, abduction and prostitution.

### *Summary*

The three expansive conceptual orientations briefly described above offer interlocking processes to assist the capacity of family, neighbourhoods and communities to create and sustain developmental infrastructure and sustained community commitment to place children and young people at the centre. Play a Part interventions were designed to realise such goals and have been useful to arrange general measures and indicators of the achievements of the program. Each orientation required varied resources and initiatives to meet specific audiences, criterion and objectives.

The next section presents the interpretive findings from the evaluation-research with stakeholders and from the program data.

# 7

“Children can be resilient and strong if they are given the support. It can just be one person that makes a difference and it could be you.”

## Presentation of the Findings

This evaluation-research investigated efforts to set prevention goals, and to understand if and how the Play a Part program assisted communities to action and sustain the development of resources and initiatives to be child friendly communities. The previous section provided an appreciation of the conceptual orientation to ascertain how the claims of the Play a Part program are substantiated. The approach to evaluate the Play a Part program is theory-driven, with consideration given to both community context and stakeholder perspectives of what actions guided community change and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

The evaluation-research involved a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders to establish their perspectives and appreciation of the practices, vision and characteristics of the Play a Part program (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The use of an interpretive approach to data analysis yielded significant richness, and provided opportunity for consideration of the complexity of community engagement and development methods that aimed to prevent child abuse through the creation of child friendly communities. A detailed description of the methodology used to arrive at these findings can be found in Section 3 p.10.

The following interpretive findings are arranged under five main categories emergent from the data. These are:

- Community understanding of prevention of child abuse and neglect
- Engaged with the community - Targeted populations
- We can stop this. Identifiable catalysts
- The practice of listening and hearing children and young people as social citizens
- Prevention Activities

### 7.1 Community understanding of prevention of child abuse and neglect

The first category emerged from stakeholder's perspectives on prevention. During the evaluation-research the Play a Part staff ascribed: *'depending who you are, who you see, who your contacts are, what your experience is'*, prevention of child abuse and neglect can look very different to local communities, cultures and individuals. Accordingly, this evaluation-research reviewed understanding of prevention held by the communities Play a

Part worked with. Distinctions and expectations for prevention of child abuse and neglect were explained in local context.

Four distinct components emerged as aspects of prevention based on informant's awareness of the Play a Part program and knowledge of '*what it takes*' for prevention of child abuse and neglect. The four components include: Systems organisational strategies; 'It takes a village'; Child friendly, family friendly; and, Early targets, early outcomes. Each component was perceived as a principal scheme with multidimensional and complex levels that convey universal prevention strategies.

### *Systems & organisational strategies*

The 'systems and organisational' component referred to the wider scope of governance, policy and social structures that enable prevention to occur. Play a Part works on global and macro levels to realise prevention by advocating changes to systems, process and policies related to children and young people. Additionally, an important aspect of the work Play a Part undertook was advocacy and promotion of child friendly communities to raise awareness, knowledge and to motivate people to work towards the prevention of child abuse. Engaging representatives of government and non-governmental organisations, and sharing the experiences of children and families were seen as important aspects of prevention to ensure optimum prospects for children and young people in their local communities. Informants identified several areas under the systems and organisational component that they believed were critical to prevention. These included *advocating, educating, (and) letting people know prevention does work*. A service provider described the significance of developing a common aim and building capacity across systems and organisations. She explained,

*"It's that cohesiveness...around how they can better integrate the service deliveries for families...We are a bit of a player with that. So, it's about knowing what they are doing and knowing how we can link in...It's helpful for us so that we can get involved in some of that planning that goes on for communities and the needs of families."*

Informants felt Play a Part directly supported '*systems and organisational strategies*' in their communities by:

- promoting common understanding of the interconnectedness for child and family well-being;
- encouraging broader and more coordinated actions;
- expanding responsibilities;
- raising awareness of the problems families, young people and children face; and,
- improving access to needed resources and services.

### *'It takes a village'*

The phrase 'It takes a village' was a strong catchphrase of the Play a Part program. Drawn from an African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child", the phrase acknowledged that a whole of community approach is required to develop local community-led strategies, plans

and solutions. The use of the phrase in the Play a Part program spoke to the idea that local residents are their own best resource for bringing about change in areas important to them. Endorsement of the strength of this approach was reflected by all of the informants participating in the evaluation. A worker stated,

*"We all need to look after and raise kids whether you have kids or not. It has flow on effect."*

As a distinct component of prevention, contextual understanding embraced qualities such as *collaboration, support, ownership and engagement*. One young person commented,

*"You want a bit of everyone when you are growing up...."*

The phrase was perceived as an appropriate foundation for '*what it takes*' for prevention of child abuse and neglect in the degree to which responsibility for caring and raising children was shared with other families, community members, organisations, services and government. It also summarised a combination of cultural norms, standards and resources, which support healthy relationships, engagement and roles for children in their everyday realities.

The provision of accessible services and activities for families, children and young people was considered equally crucial to maintain a supportive village. Enriched social connections reinforced the right, the means, the space and opportunities for children and young people to be listened to and helped. A young person claimed,

*"...the right as a young person to seek help, and you can go and get it."*

Being able to seek help from peers and other people in a child or young person's *village* provided an ethical imperative in which the occurrence of risk factors or the effects of adversity can be mitigated, and thus, was seen an optimal prevention strategy. Building on the '*systems and organisational*' component, '*it takes a village*' maintained a bottom up perspective to engage multiple connections, participation and collaboration, and to foster protective processes for children, young people and families in their own neighbourhoods.

### *Child friendly, family friendly*

The significance of working with families and preserving family connections was evident in informant's descriptions of prevention under the '*Child friendly, family friendly*' component. This component reflected interactional perspectives within micro and meso levels, and the attention Play a Part paid to children's perceptions and concerns. A young person advised,

*"They [children] basically need each other's support to help support another person, which will eventually get back to everyone. It will eventually create a circle which will benefit everyone and not just one person..."*

The circle metaphor in the above statement captures the possibilities of weaving personal relationships, knowledge, child, family and social connections to solve problems. The circle was seen as important in order to create opportunities for child supportive and friendly

communities in which everyone would benefit and children were protected. This notion reflects the *'It takes a village'* mantra, but situates the individual child and family as both forebear and progeny to augment possibilities and benefits to the community. As such, prevention speaks to the significance of maintaining children's legitimacy as agents within the sociocultural system, and through the preservation of family via factors that support help seeking, strengthen protective traits, educate and support shared values for families to prosper in, within the sociocultural system. A service provider claimed,

*"That we try to preserve families where possible, but not to the extent that kids are left in harmful situations. That we consider cultural overlay and look at different cultural contexts but understand that...we still have a set of values that are Australian driven."*

Another informant shared a range of family friendly values that were understood to legitimise children within a family unit, and thus influence positive life patterns of individuals and families, and consequently prevention of child abuse and neglect. She said,

*"Everyone has a responsibility in a community based approach. Whether you are a business and you are looking at child friendly policies, or you are parents who are working late, then looking at the flexibilities of having a child come into work with them, or to be able to take days off and have parenting arrangements...you run a club or sport and you ensure that kids who are vulnerable or at risk are engaged in the sport and they are not marginalised. Childcare responsiveness and ability to look at early development. All those sort of components of it. I think the values are good values."*

The *'Child friendly, family friendly'* component illustrated awareness of complex interrelational nuances that promote prevention and protective responses, and create optimal outcomes in the first and last place for children and families. The significance of *'everyone has a responsibility'* reverberated in the interview data as meaningful to sustain child friendly and family friendly actions.

### *Early targets, early outcomes*

There was consensus that prevention programs should be targeted and timed to affect the likelihood of problems and issues related to child abuse and neglect from occurring at all. This was echoed by a young person in their statement,

*"Bringing in the cure before you have to cure the outcome"*

Accordingly, greater benefits were expected of interventions that explicitly targeted social and context specific concerns rather than age-related changes. The importance of targeting problems children experience early was demonstrated in a young person's statement:

*"With children its like they are developing, its like a maze. You get to a dead end and you have got to find your own way back out."*

The maze comparison points to the interaction of individual and context specific aspects that can help children find the correct path. The provision of supportive influences was seen

as vital, with emphasis on dynamic responsiveness to ensure that another way can be found at a *dead end*.

Informants perceived early intervention targeted at infants and toddlers as useful for prevention programs. Nevertheless, principles of the *'Early targets, early outcomes'* component stressed sustaining interventions for children and young people along the continuum of their life to influence the multiple stresses and conditions in their lives. Instead of prevention strategies that concentrate on age-related changes, informants pointed to the identification of issues so that interventions address individual, family and context specific needs and optimise strengths. A community worker suggested,

*"It's being aware of what to look for at an earlier stage."*

Education was seen to be a useful tool for early outcomes while other dimensions perceived to be valid for early targeted approaches included, *'communication, I think learning, I guess understanding as well'*. A community worker elaborated,

*"Capacity building initiatives, building the capacity of certain groups and organisations. Giving them an understanding around the prevention of child abuse and neglect... it could be anything from the organisations and service provision we have that is child and family friendly minded. It could be infrastructure that we have around it, that surrounds the city."*

The prerequisite for the *'Early targets, early outcomes'* component was to target interventions appropriately in consideration of a range of complexities. Distinctions and expectations for *'early targets, early outcomes'* determined expedient knowledge, awareness, communication and infrastructure to support individuals, families and communities as methods to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring. Importantly, the *'early targets, early outcomes'* component was seen as a proactive approach. In the words of a community worker,

*"...the proactive approach I guess, as opposed to the reactive."*

### *Summary*

These four components (Systems & organisational strategies; *'It takes a village'*; Child friendly, family friendly; and Early targets, early outcomes) reflect noteworthy consensus in the values held by the communities and Play a Part. Informants in the evaluation did not view prevention as an outcome, but rather as a series of integrated processes in which Play a Part worked to sustain ongoing development in a cyclic method.

The principles and values that the communities held for effective prevention of child abuse and neglect encompassed dynamic interactions and opportunities to preserve reciprocal connections, and serve as a basis for relevant interventions to uphold local and individual sensitivity. A service provider affirmed,

*"So if all those layers are supporting and working together in the way they should be and...and are around that child ... That's prevention!"*

## 7.2 Engaged with the community -Targeted populations

Play a Part engaged with relevant individuals, networks, groups, organisations and partnerships to prevent child abuse through the creation of child friendly communities. The program worked to initiate action, involve all and inspire others to *play a part* in preventing child abuse and neglect.

Through training sessions, workshops, word of mouth, letters, meetings, community events and ongoing promotion, Play a Part established and sustained relationships with stakeholders. Over two and half years, Play a Part built connections among practitioners, residents, agencies, businesses and other members of the community. They gained legitimacy through participating with these communities to positively influence safe family and community environments, and to respond to children's needs more effectively. The following sub-themes determine the extent of effectiveness of the community engagement strategy and the complexity of the target population.

### *Partnerships, how relationships were initiated, and developed.*

Despite the short time-frame of operation, Play a Part established ongoing partnerships with a range of stakeholders. Play a Part participated in both formal and informal engagement with people and groups from every sector across the geographical regions. A community worker praised their initiatives, saying,

*“I think they have engaged with the community quite well. I know they have delivered a number of key events like youth speak outs on Macleay Island and they have run... a series of training and information sessions at the community centres.... I think they have done that quite well, as far as being involved with the community at the beginning and investing in community.”*

Relationships with the organisations, shown below (Table 3), have resulted in community development interventions, action plans, educational activities, workshops, resources development, community events and capacity building to ensure transformational, flow on effects emergent from these relationships.



## Play a Part Community Partnerships

Consortiums & Networks	Non-Government Organisations	Government Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beenleigh Family Support Network</li> <li>• Holistic Empowering Communities (HEC) Consortium</li> <li>• Indigenous Suicide Prevention group</li> <li>• Child Friendly Communities Consortium &amp; Action Groups</li> <li>• Redland City Council- Child &amp; Family Friendly Redlands Network &amp; Redlands Youth Interagency Network</li> <li>• Logan City Council- Youth Network</li> <li>• Qld Child Protection Week Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Save the Children</li> <li>• Benevolent Society</li> <li>• Multilink</li> <li>• ACCES Services Inc.</li> <li>• Kalwun</li> <li>• Bejaki</li> <li>• Bay Island Community Services Inc.</li> <li>• Southern Morton Bay Island Communities Group</li> <li>• Bay Island JAG</li> <li>• PCYC</li> <li>• Grow support</li> <li>• Eagleby Youth Space</li> <li>• Twin Rivers</li> <li>• Boys Town</li> <li>• Koru Consulting</li> <li>• Kingston East Neighbourhood Group</li> <li>• Career Employment Australia</li> <li>• Lifeline RAI</li> <li>• Spiritus</li> <li>• Communities for Children</li> <li>• Endeavour Foundation</li> <li>• Bennleigh Domestic Violence Service</li> <li>• RSPCA</li> <li>• World Vision (Kids Hope)</li> <li>• Scouts Australia</li> <li>• Eagleby Giants (Community Ass. Inc.)</li> <li>• St Vincent de Paul</li> <li>• Wesley Mission</li> <li>• IFACS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qld Health</li> <li>• Corporate Service Support Officer Beenleigh</li> <li>• Metro South Health Services District</li> <li>• Beenleigh Library</li> <li>• Department of Child Safety</li> <li>• Redland Bay Hospital</li> <li>• Beenleigh Child Health</li> <li>• Regional Development Australia</li> <li>• Queensland Police Service</li> <li>• ATODS Logan</li> <li>• Education Qld (Every Child Counts)</li> </ul>
Business	Education	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• iStreet Lab</li> <li>• Caribbean Arts</li> <li>• Bayside Multimedia</li> <li>• Blue Light Disco Ass</li> <li>• Edmund Rice Foundation</li> <li>• Big Red Cats</li> <li>• Nationwide Training Academy</li> <li>• Victory Security</li> <li>• Photovoice Australia</li> <li>• Chamber of Commerce – Macleay Island</li> <li>• Grunt Media</li> <li>• Tradetorque Design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victoria Point High School</li> <li>• All About Kids Early Learning Centre</li> <li>• Macleay Island Primary School &amp; P &amp; C</li> <li>• Victoria Point Child Care Centre</li> <li>• Yellow Brick Road Children's Centre</li> <li>• Bay Island Early Learning &amp; Care</li> <li>• Beenleigh High School</li> <li>• Victoria Point High School</li> <li>• Beenleigh Primary State School</li> <li>• Eagleby State School</li> <li>• Early Childhood Teachers Association</li> <li>• Eagleby Children's Centre</li> <li>• Good Start Early Learning</li> <li>• Windaroo Valley High School</li> <li>• Gowrie Qld &amp; Centres</li> <li>• Eager Bees Children's Centre</li> <li>• Beenleigh Children's Centre</li> <li>• Redland Bay Family Day Care Centre</li> <li>• Griffith University</li> <li>• Australian National University</li> <li>• Eagleby South State School</li> <li>• QUT</li> <li>• Office of Early Childhood Association</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bay Island Photovoice Project</li> <li>• Stradbroke Museum &amp; Art Gallery</li> <li>• Bert van Manen (MP) Federal Member for Forde</li> <li>• Evan Moorhead (MP) State Member for Waterford</li> <li>• Desley Scott (MP) State Member for Woodridge</li> </ul>

Table 3. Play a Part Community Partnerships

Partners observed strong relationships were gained through a strategy of ‘*going out to the community, rather than community coming to you*’. This was seen as an essential and effective engagement process of the Play a Part program.

### *Populations, groups, audience and communities*

Due to the limitations of the evaluation-research, it is problematic to assess the degree to which Play a Part adequately reached the target population. The target group was described as,

*“Families with children aged 0-8 years with a priority focus on the most vulnerable children, young people and their families.”*

Additionally, Service Users were described in detail in the Play a Part Service Agreement under 2.6.

#### **2.6 Service Users**

Across the two geographic areas, service users will potentially include the following:

- Families with children aged 0-8 years, who find themselves in vulnerable situations with a focus on making a difference early in a child’s life and at key transition points throughout the child’s life
- Parents
- carers of children age 0-8 years
- community groups and organisations
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- funded service providers
- educational institutions - schools and universities
- local businesses
- Logan and Redland City Councils and relevant State and Commonwealth government departments
- faith communities
- sporting clubs

**Table 4. Service Users**

How the target population was described in the Service Agreement is at odds with all three conceptual orientations (Figure 2, p.22) with which the program was delivered. There was no evidence apparent to suggest formal or descriptive processes were used to determine and purposely engage people who were *the most vulnerable children, young people and families*.

In seeking to work within a public health model, specifically at the primary level, greater prominence was directed to all members of a community to avoid stigmatising and isolating some members as *the most vulnerable*, or wrongdoers. The position held by Play a Part staff was that all communities, all people—regardless of income, political persuasion, religious ideology, race or vulnerability—have a part to play to engage in activities that promote the wellbeing and protection of all children within their community.

Importantly, Play a Part worked with a *holistic*, public health model to avoid the perception of blaming individuals. Their approach conceded to more complex concerns to safeguard children and deliver preventions initiatives, which also targeted older children and young people. The significance of this was shared in a young person's conversation, which demonstrated the complexities at play around safeguarding children and young people, and that also necessitate appreciation of an expanded target group. She said,

*"I babysit like 5 different groups of kids. At one stage we had 10 kids in a house looking after them for a day while their parents went out. So us teenagers kinda get the second parent role to look after them while the parents go out and do what they want. So our teenage phase just is, we look after the kids while the parents have fun."*

Informants in the evaluation-research indicated the importance of developing an understanding of the social and economical determinants across the community rather than approaching specific groups or age-related targets within the community. A worker stated,

*"Look we need help in all sorts of areas, from the very young to the very old. For welfare, for disabled people. Even business people that are doing it tough. It's everybody who is doing it tough. Not just the social, not just the people who haven't got jobs, its everybody...More in particular the young, the old and the disabled...There are so many gaps."*

There was evidence that through an approach to target related problems or issues within the whole of population, Play a Part did successfully reach *vulnerable children, young people and their families*. For example:

- Beenleigh Family Fun Day and Eagleby Youth Week (Party in the Park) created opportunities to identify children and young people's social issues (which were evidenced as entirely distinctive), and link a number of youth supports to help address their concerns. Reports in both regions were given to local councils outlining prospective development and implementations for safe, child friendly spaces and activities, and helped to improve council maintenance of park facilities. The initiative raised awareness of the safety of children as a significant community issue and increased the responsibility of the local councils to ensure the safety of children in public spaces (Play a Part Portfolio, 2010-2013<sup>1</sup>).
- Establishment of the Qld Health and child care centres partnership resulted in all children receiving health and wellbeing checks, and early identification of health and developmental issues for some children. This incentive helped to close gaps in the identification of early indicators of child abuse and neglect, provided access to appropriate support sensitive to families with children aged 0-8, and implement actions that build capacity and strength in families and communities (Play a Part Performance report, 1/07/2012<sup>2</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> The Play a Part Portfolio is a living document recording project activities and achievements.

<sup>2</sup> Performance reports are provided regularly to QLD Department of Communities.

## Summary

While a whole of population approach to prevent child abuse and neglect may be more challenging to quantify, Play a Part's focus on all members of a community highlighted the following:

- limited public awareness concerning appreciation of the universal and interrelated issues related to child abuse and neglect and systematic strategies to address problems;
- the need to broadly raise issues of child abuse prevention as a matter of public concern;
- the need to implement a range of interventions to respond to child safety issues as raised by children and young people as a priority; and,
- the significance of developing further understanding of the impacts on all children, families and the community to build effective prevention strategies.

### 7.3 We can stop this. Identifiable catalysts

Play a Part acted as a catalyst change agent, stressing the need for change in community attitudes actions and values towards supporting families, children and young people. A staff member specified,

*"We can stop this. We as a community, we each have some part to play no matter how small and insignificant you feel it is. We can have something to say or do or help a vulnerable family, or a child in need. You know we can all do something."*

Play a Part's relationship and participation in various networks was perceived by informants as a means to organise and promote the potential of communities working together, and to start much needed dialogue between community members. Child abuse prevention and early intervention efforts were useful mechanisms for developing a shared vision and sense of common purpose to mitigate social stratification and to reduce vulnerabilities. Two informants shared their understanding of Play a Part's role in networks and partnerships saying,

*"I guess in relation to that particular network, Play a Part were a driving force behind the establishment of that network and, I ...I guess they were looking at it and saying, Hey we need to get people talking out here."*

*"[Play a Part] was involved with instigating a round table at Beenleigh...some of the young people, children were congregating at the park that's adjacent to the library waiting for mum or dad or primary carer to pick them up and they weren't being collected until six o'clock. And so (Play a Part) saw a real concern for safety in that aspect."*

Engagement is about 'exchange'. Agencies involved in networks or partnerships acknowledged the isolation and singularity of their work practices. Play a Part successfully

initiated exchanges, and coordinated resources and people to meet the needs of individuals and community members. A service provider explained,

*“Making other organisations aware of each other because sometimes you get a little bit isolated into, focused into what you are doing and its hard to sometimes connect with others, and I think that linkage is not always highly viable but its always useful and I see that as a positive outcome.”*

A community worker referred to Play a Part’s achievement to solve problems across communities and groups as a process of joining the dots. She said,

*“So it is like trying to join the dots instead of working in silos. So we thought Play a Part was a brilliant opportunity to share cross knowledge so we incorporate other things we are doing, but also Play a Part stuff is being shared with others.”*

Play a Part staff explained their task to facilitate exchanges as *finding out what is in the community and waking it up. Sometimes it’s a matter of waking it up, or connecting the dots.* An example was given by one staff member:

*“For instance, [an organisation] said they have a lot of clients with budget problems and he said he didn't have the time to do that. Then I said, hey I know somebody who gives budget training for free. How about I connect you two.”*

### *Summary*

The *We can stop this. Identifiable catalysts* category demonstrated Play a Part as a catalyst change agent. Play a Part was not seen as an authority but, rather, able to communicate a clear vision and listen to what community members said about their vulnerabilities, problems or issues. Play a Part’s role and participation was often understood as a driving force ensuring optimum prospects for children and young people. Evident in the data was the intrinsic value and respect Play a Part exhibited towards communities, families, young people and children. A community worker shared:

*“[They] obviously got a very passionate personal drive for children’s safety and that shines through...I think they provide an incredibly important service.”*

## **7.4 The practice of listening and hearing children and young people as social citizens**

Play a Part established a useful culture of participation that demonstrated a strong commitment to the involvement of children and young people. This culture was acknowledged and supported by the community, and in turn the community was more committed to support the activities and interventions of the Play a Part program. Evidenced in a staff member’s comments, a culture of listening and hearing children and young people legitimised efforts to make connections with the community. She said,

*"I wasn't there providing lip service. I was there doing something positive. Building that capacity, and empowering the children. So from that point onwards it kind of, the whole attitude towards me changed."*

Moving beyond a problem-focused paradigm, children and young people's participation led to positive development of approaches to identify and solve complex patterns and causes of abuse and neglect. An informant stated,

*"I think [Play a Part] gets a dialogue started. Although it doesn't explicitly come out and say this is based on [child abuse] you know, I think it starts to push young children and young people's profiles a little bit more to the forefront... So I think that's positive."*

Stakeholders perceived the active participation of children and young people in decision making-making and actions at local and regional levels as essential to build inclusive and child friendly communities. Nevertheless, most interviewees expressed limitations and challenges within their roles, skills or organisational structure to facilitate the appropriate space and meaningful opportunities for children and young people to participate in decision making-making and actions. In talking about how opportunities are provided for children's voices to be incorporated, a service provider explained,

*"There would be the ability for...children, to be giving feedback. I am aware that there are forms... But my personal opinion would be that we could be doing better. A lot better."*

Play a Part actively provided opportunities for workers, children and young people to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and experience for children and young people to be social citizens. The accounts below demonstrate the complexity of factors at play, authorising children's influence in decision making-making and actions. These include a pre-disposition on the part of adults to value what children have to say; an appreciation of the space they need to feel safe; and, the divergent ways they express their views and the uniqueness of their perspective. A community worker said,

*"We have been learning quite a lot recently that a lot of adults are prepared to make decisions in the names of children without necessarily consulting children. You may think you have got the best interests of children at heart but unless you have actually asked them for their opinion and their input they can virtually be invisible and ignored. It's not really true, that their rights aren't truly being taken into consideration. They just don't have the same standing in the community when it comes to funding and accessing equity."*

While discussing the provision of Play a Part community education programs, a service provider explained,

*"In the stuff we did, all about the young people. It was really interactive and um, I found it challenging at times. Um, because that space obviously gave them a period of time where it was all about them, and you could see some of the children don't often get that. And so to facilitate that room, to give every sort of personality a go, and having input... The first one we had to, we had so much content to share with them. I had to say "hey, hang on a minute, remember we talked about one person at a time". But [Play a Part] gave us feedback saying*

*maybe we should fit in more time to just talk. Yeah, so I think, gosh, even just having an opportunity for the young people, you share one or two key things and they just talk...It's really insightful and quite... yeah! Kind of, -very old soul- kind of stuff. Yeah, these kids have thought about these issues, and they were really a part of their lives."*

### *Summary*

Play a Part staff worked conscientiously and explicitly to build solid foundations to support child-centred values across the community. Children and young people were upheld as social citizens. It was understood that the Play a Part program strongly facilitated processes that recognise children as members of a family and a community with rights and responsibilities appropriate to their stage of development. An observation shared by an informant was,

*"I think they do child consultation stuff really well. So whether its high-school, upper primary, engaging with playgroup or, they really do draw and put the child's focus on everything."*

## **7.5 Prevention Activities**

The Prevention Activities category more specifically elucidates the key activities Play a Part implemented across the geographical areas to contribute to actions and to sustain the development of child friendly communities. The goal of these activities was to inform, empower and build strength-based capacity in the social contexts of children and young people. These activities were grouped under three headings as Community Education, Giving Children a Voice, and Community Development. Table 5 demonstrates the purpose, interventions, outcomes and ongoing development in the communities.

Activity	Purpose	Intervention	Outcomes
<b>Community Education</b>	The provision of opportunities for members of local communities to identify their learning needs and access information sessions designed to strengthen the capacity of children to be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse and walk the streets safely on their own. Topic areas may include positive parenting, respectful relationships, assertive communication, protective behaviours and negotiation and conflict resolution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forums</li> <li>• Child safety presentation</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Training and development</li> <li>• Posters &amp; factsheets</li> <li>• Blue ribbon day (localised version of National Child Protection Week)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness raising</li> <li>• Community mobilisation</li> <li>• Expanded knowledge of safeguarding and reporting requirements</li> <li>• Live Well</li> <li>• Be free from harm</li> <li>• Promotion of Child Friendly Communities</li> <li>• Strengthened protection traits of children, young people and community</li> </ul>
<b>Giving Children a Voice</b>	Involved working with key stakeholders to support the development and implementation of mechanisms within Redlands and Logan City Councils that enable children to have a say such as a Children's Council. Key stakeholders will include children, parents, schools, councillors and council staff, community groups and organisations, funded service providers, other government departments and local businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth festival</li> <li>• Speakouts</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Arts engagement</li> <li>• Community meeting</li> <li>• Photovoice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting transitional development</li> <li>• Children included in decisions about them</li> <li>• Free to express themselves</li> <li>• Meeting needs &amp; appropriate standards</li> <li>• Reach their potential</li> <li>• Play a part</li> <li>• Children/young people developed help seek knowledge &amp; behaviours</li> <li>• removing stigma</li> </ul>
<b>Community Development</b>	Involved implementation of community development initiatives to enhance the capacity of children and families to participate in family, community and social life, meet friends and play and participate in cultural and social events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family fun day</li> <li>• Speakouts</li> <li>• Community garden</li> <li>• NAIDOC week celebrations morning tea</li> <li>• SMBI- transport awareness</li> <li>• Youth festival</li> <li>• Networking, sharing information</li> <li>• Local action plans</li> <li>• Animal care programs to school aged students</li> <li>• Media liaison</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building capacity</li> <li>• Engage broad advocacy</li> <li>• Inclusive practice implemented</li> <li>• Providing ethical legitimacy</li> <li>• child/family social capital</li> <li>• Policy development</li> <li>• Accountability of organisations and agencies</li> <li>• Enhanced access to resources and services</li> <li>• Enhanced individual, neighbourhood and community relationships</li> <li>• Trust and confidence</li> </ul>

Table 5. Activities



Play a Part's community engagement was fluid and seamless. The diversity of activities delivered reflected an understanding of the community's needs, ideas, aspirations and capacities. An informant observed,

*"(Play a Part) have got a vast range of programs they can offer to align with whatever the need is. And they are always willing to run them at a drop of a hat."*

### *Community Education*

The community education activities were perceived by stakeholders as beneficial to their knowledge and awareness of structures and procedures to protect children and young people from abuse or neglect. The aim of community education activities was to build community capacity to support a whole of community approach for respectful relationships and violence prevention. Successful national programs developed by NAPCAN provided leverage for many of the education activities. A key feature of the training programs included the development of competencies by workers to deliver the program independent of Play a Part staff.

Stakeholders perceived the core aspect leading to the success of Play a Part's education activities to be the language with which the programs were delivered, and in which they were able to build rapport. Whether delivered to vulnerable groups, professionals or children, the education activities were structured in a way that respected the learning criteria of participants. The community education activities maintained clear logic for comprehensive violence prevention and engaged reverential attitudinal/behaviour change and skills building that cut across group composition and pedagogy. A childcare worker stated,

*"They have to be able to have a rapport with families and children, as well as the educators. Get down to their level. Speak the families [language], cause sometimes if we are speaking in our language from a technical or from a text book...the families don't listen or then don't understand. So then when (Play a Part) are at the school, workshop or facilitating an event they are getting down with them they are actually interacting. They are getting involved with the children and that's when I think you find a good worker."*

Play a Part consulted directly with community members to incorporate the wealth of knowledge and information held by the community, and to develop localised approaches to the programs. Focus groups were held prior to the delivery of education programs to gain insight to the attitudes and behaviours of the community, and to inform delivery of programs. Consequently, as one informant stated,

*"[Play a Part] seem to have a more fluid, flexibility to tailor to what's needed."*

Childcare and school based training programs were greatly appreciated and further adapted by child care centre and school staff to meet the pedagogy of older children.

*"We have found it successful that's why we are using bits and pieces in the older group. We have requested programs [for older children] so we can run it with our after school children."*

The education activities embedded participant-focused reflection and evaluation into programs and helped to facilitate exchanges of information with other workers, families and community members. The community education activities appear to have been an effective mechanism for community mobilisation in ongoing local development of prevention strategies. Feedback from community education workshops suggested,

*“Participants... would be more vigilant in their work and be more aware of issues and signs of stress in families. Some [participants] also commented that they would share the learning with colleagues and families, and the resources shared on a USB stick would also be printed and shared with peers or families. Most participants thought information pertaining to types of abuse, flags, warning signs or indicators were significant, as well as acknowledging personal roles and responsibilities to prevent child abuse and neglect.”*

Delivery of education activities alongside community development activities complemented the key messages and activities that were in force to combat risks associated with violence, child abuse and neglect (Play a Part Portfolio, 2010-2013). A community worker observed,

*“You can see the benefits of a discreet community, that is quite contained. Where you bed yourself into that community and everyone knows you and you become a part of the community rather than a program in the community.”*

Community education activities that promoted child abuse and neglect awareness and unified action more broadly included National Child Protection week, Metro South Health Services District-Child Protection Forum, and the Blue Ribbon Community Awareness Campaign. These awareness-raising activities encouraged the communities across the region to talk about child abuse, and provided ongoing development of learning and actions to protect children and create child friendly communities. A community worker outlined perceived outcomes and the importance of promoting a balanced approach to address the real issues of child abuse and neglect in a whole of community approach. She said,

*“The big thing for me was removing stigma. Ah and talking about it. Um, and that ...middle class, white Australia is not immune to it. It seems to be kind of a pathology of the other, you know. It seems to be labelled that it’s a problem with the Indigenous people, or the refugees or the immigrants. Cos Council, Logan...has a high incidents of domestic violence...But yeah, I agree with the whole of community. It goes beyond the private sphere, ...which is a really challenging thing... it’s raising awareness.”*

Stakeholders comprehensively valued the community education activities Play a Part delivered. Interviewees summed up the importance of this type of activity to prevent child abuse and neglect, and the paucity of programs available to Queensland communities, saying,

*“I think a really valuable piece of work has been the community education. And I think in the context of the Carmody inquiry this is something that is paramount for Queensland. We do not do good community education on what is child protection, what is prevention.”*

## *Giving Children a Voice*

Giving Children a Voice involved simultaneous transformation of children, young people, families, neighbourhoods and the community to nurture genuine expression, challenge adult power and responsibility, and catalyse discussion around children and young people's perspectives, aspirations and rights in the community. As noted in the below quote, Play a Part actively trained workers and organisations to hear children and young people to work on solutions:

*"So they have done a lot of training for other orgs in those regions so some of those organisations, now there maybe someone in there that says, well we need to always think... well where is the kid's voice in this that we are doing or is this really going to keep kids safe."*

An agency worker perceived that the involvement and consideration of children and young people's needs in the community were overlooked, as they are unable to vote. However, the activities provided under the Giving Children a Voice progressed child safety concerns to a degree. She said,

*"Council's very fearful in engaging with the Community that they serve, really fearful. You know cos it's a bit sticky, and it's a big ugly sometimes...If it's not on their plan, if it's not on the Excel spreadsheet, you've got to have a pretty good argument to be able to do something. I think child safety was just one of them, I think it just happened because we went out and did it, and it was successful and we got really good feedback... we actually did have a responsibility to and a service, a responsibility to that group [children and young people]. But I think, possibly because they're not a voting age yet... they don't hold much sway."*

Through Play a Part's engagement across all the communities, children and young people were able to express their concerns. They raised questions about health issues, public spaces, unsafe natural areas, drug and alcohol concerns, social activities, structured and unstructured play, and being respected and valued in the community. Two informants shared observations of what young people and children want or expressed they needed. Both illustrated the importance of investing in the creation of child friendly secure and active spaces in the community.

*"They feel, well interestingly feel safe at home, but they don't feel safe on the streets. They don't feel safe at a shopping centre. They don't even necessarily feel safe at school."*

*"They were talking about youth culture...That there was not enough for them to do. That...school based activities are lovely thank you very much but what about after school and weekends. So that's the tiny bit of feedback we have had from just that one meeting and we are pulling together some more to see where we head with [that] information."*

For one young person involved in the evaluation-research, providing age appropriate social and recreational activities for children and young people was directly related to prevention of child abuse and neglect. She explained,

*“Well when you have got something for children to be able to do, the children can get out and away from the abuse. If we had the skate park you would see the majority of the kids would be at the skate park. They wouldn’t be stuck in a house. They wouldn’t be stuck somewhere getting hurt. They will have somewhere to go. They will have somewhere to say well I am going here. So I know I am going to be safe because I am going to be with 150 other kids. I am going to be with more than just myself or just my brothers and sisters. So the more events and the more things we can get started for kids that can get them away from that...People kind of lock themselves away and they don’t trust. But then when you start to break all those doors open you can kind of get everyone. All the kids start to realise cause we are not all naive, we understand what happens. We can all see if something is going wrong. So we all know. We can help.”*

The above quote highlights the protective role and supportive relationships that children and young people together can provide for each other. Children and young people felt that living in connected and relational child friendly communities facilitated protective factors against child abuse and neglect. Play a Part directly supported opportunities for children and young people to use their assets, strengths and skills by participating in and taking leadership of activities such as Speak Outs, iStreet Lab, coordinating events like the Blue Light Disco and directly advocating to local councils, organisations and agencies through to the Federal government. Activities within Giving Children a Voice provided a process through which children and young people not only had the opportunity to change their circumstances, but also themselves. A community member commented,

*“That you want to provide a positive interaction for these young people, who may not have a lot of those, so they can build up their banks of positive interactions.”*

One intervention supported by Play a Part under the Giving Children a Voice activities was a photo voice project. This project provided a strengths-based approach for twelve children aged 7-11. The children shared their perspectives of their community with the Mayor, learnt new skills, and gained support and respect of families and community members. Essential outcomes of this project were that children were connected with others, respected and valued, leading to a greater sense of security, shared values and interdependence. The Bay Island News, March 2012 reported,

*“These 12 children are an inspiration to us all- their enthusiasm is strong, their passion for their families and their communities is absolutely wonderful.”*

Such activities demonstrated that by engaging with communities in creative ways, collaborating with artists and using creative participatory methodologies, real options for connectedness and child friendly approaches were available. Play a Part helped children and young people to have an independent voice and feel included. An interviewee shared,

*“Their music sessions were awesome. It was in a big wheelie bin. It had been at nearly every community event that [Play a Part] was at. I really love how I got to meet Play a Part...it was from a big mural they were making and we got to put our hands, we coloured our hands and matched with what we thought...children needed. And that’s how I met them. They are now very active in our community.”*

The children and young people engaged as active creative participants to challenge and disrupt persistent and negative representations, and to establish a set of shared values to create an environment that ultimately benefits all. Listening and hearing children and young people as social citizens was fundamentally connected to having respectful relationships, and involved strength based approaches which focused on developing the whole person and being connected. In this way, Play a Part provided opportunities for children and young people to contribute to self and community with meaning and purpose.

### *Community Development*

A core aspect of Community Development activities was to establish processes from the ground up, and to create actions for communities to make decisions which were child inclusive and addressed local issues of child abuse and neglect. In this way, communities were challenged to consider the opportunities and risks for development at the global, marco, meso and micro levels. Activities emphasised agency and inter-agency liaison, developing and maintaining relationships, advocating, action planning to implement specific change, and access to resources. A service provider observed,

*“What they did effectively with the consortiums was bringing lots of players and mobilising resources, really cleverly when you have got a limited pool and say what can be put on the table, and then wrap children around with the support, rather than the opposite which is each agency working independently and trying to pull in more dollars. I think that was a nice piece of work. “*

Play a Part identified the assets of each community and focused on processes to change attitudes, improve collaboration, participation and inclusiveness for the creation of child friendly communities. While some activities such as Speakouts and family fun days were replicated across the different communities, significantly, the Play a Part approach was seen as flexible and responsive to diversity while anticipating the complexities of varied and dynamic realities locally. Staff explained,

*“There is (or should be) difference in things when you roll out activities for different groups. [We] try to capture that a little bit. That it is understood and that programs and interventions are not just a blanket approach.”*

Staff members referred to the process of creating sustainable development as a *brokerage model*. As such, staff worked with communities to help identify and develop local strategies that addressed issues and problems faced by local families, young people and children. Within the brokerage model Play a Part helped to guide and facilitate the capacity of service providers, agencies, community members and individuals to identify and develop local assets, and engage practical actions for local issues with a critical emphasis on individual responsibility and creative solutions. A staff member described how she assisted through a brokerage approach to help a service provider reconsider the criteria for at risk children. She said,

*“They are frustrated that they can't help more...and it is traumatising for them to turn the people away because they don't fit the criteria...So then I [said] that's all well and good, but these children are at risk of being part of Child Safety, because there is a risk [related to] no supervision for an unreasonable amount of time. 'Oh yeah, when you look at it like that'. So, it takes a little bit of creative thinking and that the rules and regulations and protocols are here to serve you. You are not to serve them.”*

Play a Part actively provided guidance and facilitation to *wake up* communities in order to accurately appraise what they can and cannot do to:

- articulate the needs of children and families in local contexts,
- ensure resources are available, and
- stimulate organisations, agencies and service providers to enhance their systems.

The brokage model enabled Play a Part to help children, young people and families to access services and resources, and to challenge those systems to respond appropriately to address the gaps in services to support child and family friendly services and resources. The community was both the means and the end of community development activities to provide understanding of the changes needed to prevent child abuse and neglect, and to provide a means through which to solve problems. A community worker described the importance of this approach:

*“[Play a Part] works with engaging with our community first and finding out what they are interested in and how they would see protecting children is important... engaging that way so and trying to build on something that is already there, not doing something new and coming in as an expert. So build the capacity of the community that way and do it in a manner that's universal rather than targeting a particular group so everybody is included.”*

Play a Part helped individuals, organisations and agencies to utilise their skills, knowledge and understanding in a way that no other service was able to do in the communities where they worked. A service provider discerned,

*“They come from a universal [perspective], support parents around and building capacity in communities so the way they operate fits really well with the way the consortium likes to operate...There are other organisations like Kids Help Line and stuff like that, but not specifically targeting, connecting communities and trying to work out how to um, resource, or what the resources of the community might be.”*

Play a Part highlighted the importance of public factors that can have considerable influence and offer positive change to reduce the risk of harm to children, young people and their families. A practical example in which Play a Part aligned children and young people's needs to the communities needs was the detection of insufficient co-ordinated transport planning; which resulted in a perceived problem in children's behaviour in the community. An interviewee explained,

*“So some of the little things, they sound so obvious but that whole idea when they changed the bus timetable. When they aligned with the council and said these kids have got 25 or 30 minutes, lets align it so the bus arrives and the ferry leaves almost automatically so they*

*have not got time on their hands to be mucking around. Overnight you have a turn off [to the problem] and that's pulling in business. It's pulling in community members, schools, the buses. But you get them all together and they can see this really critical win."*

The influence such public factors have for child friendly communities, and the extent that they can be easily modifiable, demonstrates a requirement to put the needs and rights of children first for long-term protective processes and environments, and to endorse emergent processes for collective responsibility and action. Critically, Play a Part achieved an imperative for everyone to take responsibility in preventative interventions by responding to complex social determinants and strengthening infrastructure and connectivity for families.

Such action has long-term benefits to sustain child friendly communities and augment prevention strategies that maintain children's legitimacy within the sociocultural system. Emphasis on multiple perspective practices, factors and relationships as a means of achieving sustained prevention requires time to tackle both structural and intermediary factors of child abuse and neglect. This understanding was echoed in informant's reflections on building trust in a community. She stated,

*"You need time because you need to build trust in a community. I know Play a Part have done that quite well in a number of communities, so you need time to do that and you need consistency to do that, it can't just be like you were saying, 2 weeks here and then ok we are going to pull you out and take you to another community. There is trust and if you pull out too early you might as well have not been there."*

### *Summary*

The Play a Part prevention activities provided both practical and progressive implementation of child friendly, family friendly actions. In addition, the activities focused on increasing the knowledge and capacity of the broad community, families, children, and young people to *play a part* in primary prevention of child abuse and neglect, and actively promote and support the right of all children and young people as citizens. As a composite approach significant progress was made to meet the needs of each community at variable interconnected levels. While programs and services for child abuse and neglect have traditionally been dominated by single factor approaches, the Play a Part program was unique in:

- the capacity to engage broad advocacy to mitigate stratification (Global);
- the capacity to develop action plans with local stakeholders to reduce exposure to disadvantage and increase child friendly and inclusive practices (Macro Level);
- the efficacy to reduce community vulnerabilities and facilitate strengths (Meso level); and,
- demonstrating how participation provides both legitimacy and emergent individual-family centeredness (Micro Level).

The composite of activities delivered under Community Education, Giving Children a Voice and Community Development assisted community mobilisation to support children to live well; ensured children and young people were included in decisions; expanded collaboration

between services, agencies and organisations, and families, young people and children; and raised greater awareness of capabilities leading to the development of early protective factors where children are free from harm.

In the *Prevention Activities* category there is indication of change across the communities taking action towards the development of child friendly communities. Evidence suggests the Play a Part program has been effective to promote and facilitate improvements in young people's social wellbeing and increased participation in community and civic matters. This has been achieved through effectively engaging young people and children via good community awareness and education and training activities. The way in which activities were grouped facilitated ongoing dialogue, respectful of the principles and values that the community held for effective prevention of child abuse and neglect. The activities were nested in integrated processes to determine the resources, assets and knowledge for the community to act together to achieve ongoing development of child friendly communities. The prevention activities upheld a broad universal approach, which continuously maintained children and young people's voice at the heart of all actions to improve child wellbeing and reduce maltreatment. An informant stated,

*"A lot of [Play a Part's] work on the Moreton Bay islands in consultation with children, related to the space that children were in."*

Play a Part dynamically accentuated everyone's responsibility to prevent child abuse and neglect.



# 8

“The strategy is not about how they intervene with the parent, but how they might get the voice of the children heard.”

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This section reviews and discusses the earlier findings against the Play a Part conceptual orientation to answer the evaluation-research questions. The framework that underpins Play a Part is an entwined theoretical and methodological orientation that determined how staff initiated action to achieve inclusive, safe and child friendly communities. The Play a Part program demonstrated operative prevention strategies in which communities and individuals were informed, better connected and felt empowered, to make positive changes in their lives and reduce the risk of harm to children and their families. Examined together, the findings offer an encouraging picture of the program effect.

### 8.1 Perspectives, vision and characteristics of Play a Part

This evaluation-research found that the broad conceptual orientation of the Play a Part program was an effective framework. Nevertheless, without strategic and theoretical comprehension of these canons the framework could be unwieldy, and result in mismatched measurement outputs. By undertaking a qualitative approach with the communities to determine perspectives and appreciation of the perceived practices, vision and characteristics, it was possible to gain an understanding of how Play a Part assisted the people in these regions to action the development of resources and initiatives to be child friendly communities. In summary, community engagement strategies were strengthened by:

- the Public Health model which importantly maintained an emphasis on a range of universal approaches across the whole of community, and resulted in a range of broad initiatives including addressing issues of safety for children and young people in public spaces;
- the Developmental-ecological methodology which maintained a ‘composite approach’ (sidestepping innate categorisation of the public health model) for the development of both formal and informal networks to involve children and young people in decision making about the diverse circumstances of their everyday lives; and,
- the Assets-based Community Development approach which maximised protective factors by reinforcing (through education, advocacy and inclusion) the capacity of service providers, agencies and community members to identify assets and enhance systems where gaps exists in local contexts.

Stakeholders were interested in working together in a more meaningful way and willing to do so. One of the unique advantages of the Play a Part framework is the flexibility through a universal approach that enables staff to respond to a range of identified problems and to *draw things together to work on solutions*.

Directing emphasis on strengths and assets of families and communities, rather than on the identification and management of risk in individual circumstances, enabled multiple entry points. This approach bypassed adversarial and coercive dealings to resolve difficulties; in most cases, before a risk of child abuse and neglect might be actualised. Outcomes in this approach are often longer term than the project and can involve concepts that are not straightforwardly measurable. Direct collection of baseline data would more accurately capture and support individual and community indicators of progress that align with the Play a Part orientation. Accordingly, baseline data and indicators would assist in establishing benchmarks for understanding and advancing child abuse and neglect prevention strategies.

### Recommendation 1

A critical matter to resolve is more directly aligning the collection and use of data to the Play a Part program orientation and the selection of specific strategies.

- 1.1 The Play a Part program aims be supported by clear and measurable objectives, taking into account the various levels of program implementation and activities.*
- 1.2 Implementation for subsequent phases should consider rigorous processes to collect data and assess the impact of activities against the criterion and targets reached for in each tenant (Figure 2.).*
- 1.3 Data produced should support the formation of benchmarks for understanding and advancing prevention strategies as a whole of community approach.*
- 1.4 Progressive evaluation should be implemented. Pre- and post-evaluation of community members' perspectives of prevention would benefit the establishment of context specific engagement and empowering strategies, and ascertain expedited characteristics of change in attitudes and behaviours towards primary prevention of child abuse and neglect.*

## 8.2 Responding to the questions

The evaluation-research addressed three key questions to appreciate how the community responded to and perceived the practices, vision and characteristics of the Play a Part program, and to examine practice and outcomes in the program data.

## *Effectiveness of actions to sustain child friendly communities*

### 1. How has the Play a Part (PAP) program assisted communities to action and sustain the development of resources and initiatives to be child friendly communities?

The first question concerns the extent to which the Play a Part program assisted communities to action and sustain the development of resources and initiatives to be Child Friendly Communities.

As a whole of population approach, the Play a Part program was effective at engaging with and supporting communities to learn about the *business* of child abuse and neglect. Indeed, positive changes were discussed by participants who indicated that reaching out, listening and applying a grassroots approach to solving problems assisted the development of communities that were more child friendly. Significantly, the focus on child friendly communities with children and young people as experts provided a way in to each community by emphasising strengths as a process of development, rather than *translating the practices of children and families into the language of risk* (Stanley et al., 2011, p. 50).

The established common understanding of primary prevention of child abuse and neglect held by the communities and Play a Part (Section 8.1) was encouraging. The specified distinctions and expectations for prevention suggest that communities do indeed understand *the need for everyone to do their bit*, and given the support, knowledge and resources, *can take responsibility for their own particular role to help children to thrive* (Carmody, 2013 p. xiii). The limitations of this evaluation-research cannot substantively support the notion that Play a Part was the sole stimulus of this community knowledge but the findings confirm activities such as *'advocating, educating and letting people know how prevention works'* were critical to build capacity and to promote common understanding of prevention (p. 17).

Play a Part involved a wide array of stakeholders who were seen to be a necessary part of the broader solutions. In this way the staff assisted communities to identify gaps and link up services to provide supportive strategies, and promote interactions between the community, neighbourhood, family and individual factors. In essence, turning a risk approach on its head. Informants indicated the local bottom up approach built child and family capacity to advocate for improved multi-level (i.e. between two or three levels of government) service coordination and delivery, and to facilitate positive effects on children's everyday realities. The local bottom up approach created opportunities for children to develop strong, positive relationships as active participants in the 'village', and was consistently related to positive outcomes by informants in the evaluation-research.

The Play a Part program was unique as a prevention program in the way that it engaged children and young people to have a voice and to be heard in many intersections of the community. Play a Part encouraged communities to recognise children and young people as members of society who have the right to be listened to, respected, as well as protected. This emphasis challenges adult presumptions to exercise choice on behalf of children and young people, and understanding that acquiring responsibility for someone does not mean taking responsibility away from them. The data conveys the importance of actively and

creatively involving children and young people by ‘speaking with’, ‘listening to’ and ‘involving’ children and young people to energetically ensure collective efficacy to prevent child abuse and neglect. There is, however, further need to support ongoing development of child-led initiatives at local levels across all the communities involved, and to support grassroots arrangements with children able and mandated to speak on behalf of their peers.

*“Any advocacy to promote children’s participation must be rooted in a clear understanding of how the Convention on the Rights of the Child elaborates the concept and the explicit obligations it imposes on communities and governments.” (Lansdown, 2010, p. 14).*

To continue to create opportunities for children’s participation, it is important to build partnerships with other initiatives to ensure that children’s rights are reflected in, and are a part of, any broader advocacy and commitment for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. There is a critical scarcity of evidence exemplifying how communities can help children express their rights and translate their views into practices related to the protection of their rights, as informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Play a Part’s work to involve children and young people positions the program as an important forerunner to develop useful agendas for a child-led, rights-based concept of participation in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Future phases of the Play a Part program should prioritise research investigating their child-led initiatives to build evidence of how children and young people express their views in safe spaces, and how their views can be entrenched into the creation of child-led infrastructures.

## Recommendation 2

Continue to actively and creatively involve children and young people by ‘speaking with’, ‘listening to’ and ‘including’ children and young people at the heart of prevention strategies and ensure their efficacy to wield cultural and normative influences in and with their communities.

- 2.1 Continue to revise alignment of knowledge and understandings of the ‘business’ of child abuse and neglect to remain in step with local communities and changes in prevention system over time.*
- 2.2 Build on the uniqueness and usefulness of the program for child-led, rights based concepts of child abuse and neglect prevention.*
- 2.3 Continue to enrich opportunities for children’s participation through creative participatory methods and leadership development.*
- 2.4 Seek out longitudinal evaluation to ascertain how Play a Part supported children and young people to reach their potential.*
- 2.5 Drive home the message that communities do indeed, understand the need for everyone to do their bit, but need the support, knowledge and resources to take responsibility.*

## *Identifiable catalysts and resources of successful engagement and empowering processes*

### 2. Are there identifiable catalysts and resources that can ensure successful engagement and empowering processes?

Demonstrated in the interview and focus group data, stakeholders understood Play a Part's community engagement strategy as an investment in their communities. The brokerage model described by Play a Part staff was a strategic tactic for successful engagement and empowering processes. The approach was clearly useful to accurately appraise local assets and resources, articulate the needs of children and families and stimulate organisations, agencies and service providers to enhance child friendly and inclusive practices. Brokering positioned in an assets-based approach provided the opportunity for individuals to be co-producers of services and support, rather than passive or unreceptive consumers of services. Enabling systems was not about more services but about what those services and champions in the community do.

The achievements of Play a Part in Beenleigh, Eagleby, Victoria Point, Redland Bay and Macleay and Russell Island communities were perceived to positively ascertain, shape and expand existing systems to support child friendly communities. These achievements were founded and identifiable in several processes and elements, including:

- Staff motivation and enthusiasm based on a feeling that *"things could be better"*;
- Confidence and expectation of a self-guided improvement culture *"no matter how small and insignificant"*, transpiring as a flexible continuum involving individuals (micro), family (meso), community (macro) and societal systems (global);
- Conviction in the future of all children being safe and appreciation that realising that future depends on the action of community members;
- Commitment to the UN Rights of the Child and the implications of actions within the whole of community;
- Action as, and nurturing local champions in the prevention of child abuse and neglect;
- Collaboration - a strong flexible philosophy of cooperation and participation across disciplines and groups;
- Cultivation of partners locally and externally - actively and swiftly seeking, informing, and developing networks with supporters;
- Working hard and maintaining the processes and principles linked to the primary prevention of child abuse and neglect (found in the Innocenti Research Centre model); and,
- As a team maintaining a focus on specific local actions without losing sight of the broader goals.

The evaluation report of the first phase of Play a Part (2007-2010) identified the individual efforts of the project workers as a catalyst to influence collective efficacy and action in community agencies and groups. Reflection of the data in this evaluation-research indicates that the multidisciplinary perspective of the Play a Part staff and their individual efforts remain a noteworthy catalyst. The diverse skills, training and knowledge of staff members

ensured identification and development of the capacity of the communities to support ongoing child friendly processes.

As a small team the multidisciplinary perspective of each staff member significantly enriched language and dynamic conversations between community members to join the dots in thinking and action. Whether engaging with vulnerable groups, professionals from child safety services and community workers, families, children or young people, each staff member respected the multiplicity of perspectives and as a team expedited the type of decision making uniquely possible through a multidisciplinary approach. The varied professional values, skills, language and knowledge each staff member brought to the program fostered abilities to develop rapport and language of common goals, and the interpretation and transparency of the program agenda to keep children safe. These elements are augmented elsewhere as important tools to create an 'authorising environment' for collaboration and to demonstrate 'public value' to keep children 'safe and well' (Winkworth & White, 2011, p. 11)

### Recommendation 3

Build on previous program experience and achievements, and the knowledge and skills of staff to maximise creative, multidiscipline thinking and actions for the development of child friendly communities.

- 3.1 Draw on prior experiences, achievements and effective outcomes and seek opportunities to increase recognition of shared collaborative expertise to advance child abuse and neglect preventative strategies.*
- 3.2 Support ongoing professional development of staff and exchange of knowledge - compare and contrast individual capabilities and engage continuing professional development exchange across a range of disciplines e.g. community development, child protection/social services, child care approaches.*
- 3.3 Incorporate the educational potential of reflective practice by staff and community champions.*
- 3.4 Promote and disseminate the creative ways problems have been solved and successful examples of prior engagement and collaborative practice which can build respect for staff and partnering communities, and that foster the unique leadership role of Play a Part for primary prevention of child abuse and neglect in Queensland.*
- 3.5 Continue to respond and develop training programs that meet the needs of communities including community education activities related to child protection reporting and processes.*
- 3.6 Continue to ensure that stakeholders are deeply involved in planning, developing, monitoring, problem-solving and review of actions - there is room to improve the effectiveness of engagement through sharing information through social media and greater data collection e.g. surveys using social media.*

*Program achievements to inform future community development program related to child abuse.*

3. Can program achievements be expanded upon in future community development programs related to child abuse?

Findings of the evaluation-research do, in fact, point to sound reasons at a macro level to focus attention on prevention policies and funding at the community level to prevent child abuse and neglect. Current attention, as highlighted in the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (2013), is focussed too heavily on priorities that deal with the protection of children as a measurable fact of risk relating typically to specialised social service, health, and justice systems. There was a strong perception by the informants that integrated processes sustained in ongoing community development more appropriately supported prevention strategies mindful of the blurry everyday realities of children and families.

Play a Part program achievements can be expanded through effective feedback mechanisms that ensure children, young people and family's everyday realities, ideas and opinions are emphasised in economic and social policies, provision of funding, service delivery and community programs. The development of strong collaborative partnerships between government and non-government sectors has been an essential achievement of the Play a Part program. Partnerships and collaborative efforts should be continued and utilised in future programs to help bridge the gap between *tensions in the current arrangements* of child protection (Carmody, 2013 p. 425), and to inform and advocate for "*where we ought to be*" through cohesive economic and social policies related to families, funding, service delivery and community programs.

In the two and a-half years since Play a Part initiated community engagement strategies in Beenleigh, Eagleby, Victoria Point, Redland Bay and the Macleay and Russell Moreton Bay Island communities, the program generated timely and decisive development for child abuse and neglect prevention as a whole of community approach. They have strengthened connections with and between children, young people, families and community partners. Nevertheless, effective prevention requires early, active and sustained engagement. As Play a Part prepares to leave these communities, important factors for consideration concerns the capacity of the communities to support sustainable actions and the extent to which particular prevention strategies are sustainable.

There was a general consensus amongst informants that sustainability guidance is essential as a conclusive component to Play a Part's community development activities. Identification of champions to provide sustainability guidance was recommended by an agency worker to preserve the responsibility of the community for prevention-focussed planning. She said,

*"I think when you identify champions in some ways... I think when you introduce something you offer it up, you draw in interested parties, you get them on board, they're functioning, um, and there's a natural champion or champions that grow out of that. Then I think you can*

*just safely step away, allow them to do, yeah to carry on. Um, but I think it's a lot to expect, just to provide the skeleton and step away. And I think it's long term."*

At the time of interviews with stakeholders, informants largely felt that prevention was achieved by building communities that support and value children and families yet the capacity of the recipient communities to continue innovations beyond Play a Part's engagement was not fully reached. A service provider stated,

*"My personal opinion is that no they haven't got it to the point where they can pull out. They have built the relationship but I would personally think that if they were to up sticks and move it would be hard to sustain, it would be hard to keep it going and I think people would be distrustful of someone who tried to fill that space."*

Building capacity for longer-term collaboration and partnership is as important as ensuring immediate and tangible bottom up benefits for communities. Moreover, building trust and confidence among stakeholders and community members is a very important dimension that requires time. While sustainability is typically placed toward the end of the change process, suggestion is made that future programs incorporate sustainability activities much earlier and optimally as part of the initial design process (Flynn & Simpson, 2009; Johnson, Hays, Center, & Daley, 2004). Play a Part's role as a catalyst change agent provided valuable social development in community attitudes and action towards prevention of child abuse and neglect. As the program transitions into new communities there is a valuable opportunity to enhance sustainability and long-term relationships through the expansion of current stakeholder's roles as mentors (i.e. to help new communities by promoting the potential of communities working together, sharing creative child friendly activities such as the iStreet or Photovoice activities).

Participation and involvement were important aspects of the achievement of the Play a Part program and can now be expanded with an emphasis on building bridges between communities to successfully address family and societal problems.



## Recommendation 4

Given the existing prevention initiatives in Queensland, recommendation is made to strongly advocate for significant and new investment in the potential of integrated community-based prevention strategies to impact child safety and wellbeing at a whole of community level.

- 4.1 Staff and advisory members seek stronger relationships with all government levels in the geographical areas to increase understanding of prevention approaches and practices and ensure children's voice is embedded across-government policies and provisions.*
- 4.2 Staff should continue to pursue the development of strong collaborative partnerships between the government and the non-government sector as an essential component of the program.*
- 4.3 Future programs should incorporate sustainability as part of the initial design process.*
- 4.4 A strategy should be devised which accommodates sustainability guidance via expanding current community stakeholder's roles as mentors and to help share child friendly apparitions in new communities.*
- 4.5 Pursue a role in the establishment of a Family and Child Council to work with the sector and government and to enhance the delivery of high-quality prevention strategies that consider children at the heart of policies and practices.*
- 4.6 Adopt a five year planning cycle to accommodate the needs of community members to validly and credibly support ongoing action, secure relevant resources, more appropriately monitor and evaluate changes, and inaugurate Play a Part secession from the community.*

## 8.3 Conclusion

The second phase of Play a Part offered a sophisticated locally responsive approach for future directions in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The shared vision of prevention by the communities and Play a Part importantly informed an understanding of the communities' current situation and propositions for the community to be child friendly.

Play a Part provided significant attainments of strengths based community engagement approaches. Nevertheless, investment in research is needed to substantiate more directly how community prevention activities addressed complex issues for children, young people and families, and to implement and sustain relevant, comprehensive and effective prevention policies, programs and services that will have a lasting impact on the phenomena of child abuse and neglect. As a forerunner, it is imperative that future phases aim to support the formation of benchmarks for understanding and advancing prevention strategies as a whole of community approach.

The findings presented here indicate that stakeholders gained improved skills and knowledge about various ways to reduce and prevent child abuse and neglect across the community. The findings also highlight some of the challenges inherent for organisations and agencies in conducting prevention work in isolation, especially the difficulty of engaging young people and children in decision making that affects their everyday realities. Play a Part's community education activities were perceived as invaluable as there is currently little in the way of community education about prevention strategies and ways to mitigate factors that lead to child abuse and neglect across the communities that Play a Part worked with.

Two of the greatest benefits of the Play a Part program thus far have been its whole of community approach to creating child friendly communities, and practices that ensure the voice of children and young people are at the heart of prevention strategies.

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